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PHD THESIS

Summary

MORAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL THROUGH RELIGIOUS TEXTS

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Introduction

The doctoral thesis entitled "Moral education in primary school through religious texts" aims to explore some theoretical and practical aspects related to the use of religious texts in the moral education of students. The work is structured in five chapters. The first of them, "Historical milestones and conceptual approaches in moral education", provides, in the first part, some clarification of the concepts of moral education over time, it then presents theoretical perspectives on moral development, aspects related to the fundamental components in the orientation and structuring of this dimension of education, but also the status and perspectives of moral education in contemporary education. The second chapter presents the particularities of moral education in young schoolchildren, methods, means, ways of evaluation, forms of organization of activity, but also the current trends in the approach of didactic strategies in moral education of children. The third chapter deals with the relationship between moral education and religious literature, presenting milestones of moral education in old Romanian literature, a brief history of children's literature, but also aspects related to the specifics of these texts, with an emphasis on their formative side. The fourth chapter presents the psychopedagogical research, the first part containing the description of the research design, followed by a detailing of the five studies carried out. In the preliminary study, we analyzed, through the data collected with the interview method, the conceptions of the teachers in management positions regarding the importance given to moral education. The following three studies, which capitalize on data collected through the questionnaire-based survey, analyzed the opinions of primary school teachers on various aspects related to the achievement of moral education in primary education. Study I investigated topics related to teacher training, accountability, people-support from the school, the difficulties encountered and how they can be overcome. Study II addressed issues that relate to practices used in moral education in young schoolchildren. The-third study focused on the ways of using religious texts in different educational disciplines. The experimental study includes the description of the formative intervention, carried out in order to investigate the impact that religious texts have on the internalization of moral values in primary school children. The last chapter of the thesis presents the conclusions of the research, at theoretical and practical level, its limits and future research directions.

Key-words: moral education, religious texts, primary education, didactic strategy, moral values

Argument

Morality is the essence of man and humanity, its distinctive feature. The moral side is the constituent that should influence the entire inner life of the individual, without which one could not speak of the formation of the personality.

Called "*education itself*" (Reboul, 1976), moral education is a continuous process, which is distinguished by its dimension, the most extensive and profound, by comparison with the other components of education, a process that involves the transformation of individuality, depending on values, norms, moral principles. Teachers occupy an important place in this development, in the development of education, they are meant to create possibilities in the formation of desirable behaviors of the educable, behaviors that will be the foundation of the moral conduct of the adult later.

The primary period corresponds to the period that the development of moral traits has a great weight, now forming the basis on which, later, will be built personalities and characters, which will shape the individuals, integral parts of society.

It is widely acknowledged that religion and morality are in a relationship of interdependence. Religious literature stands out for its quality as an educational tool, which, in young schoolchildren, facilitates the process of discovering their own identity, texts being sources of content that can be used to form and develop moral competencies. This children's literature has not been sufficiently exploited, it is among the other vectors of moral content.

Through an approach from the theoretical and applied perspective, the research theme provides benchmarks for the innovation, improvement, development and renewal of the instructive-educational process, at the level of the primary education, with the aim of highlighting the contribution that the use of religious literature has to the moral education of young schoolchildren.

The interest in this segment of education is far from extinguished, on the contrary, it can be said that it manifests itself more and more, in a period when the moral state of society is viewed with deep fear, when values are more and more unclear, and the younger generations, with a distorted view of the world, are strongly influenced by materialism.

At the same time, the theme also meets the requirements related to educational policy. With the implementation of the new National Curriculum, the focus shifts from teaching and learning to the student, the role of the school is to shape the personality of the educated, and the profile of the graduate could not be optimally shaped without its moral component. At the same time, the values promoted by the same National Curriculum (respect, responsibility, integrity, perseverance), all derive from a moral education carried out at a necessary and

sufficient level, to allow man to distinguish good from evil, justice from injustice, truth from untruth.

Also, the theme takes shape in accordance with the social requirements, with the requirements formulated by society towards the educational system. If we take into account what Axel Oxenstierna said, namely that "the good growth of youth is the surest guarantee of the happiness of a state", moral education does not occupy the well-deserved place in the concerns of educational factors. Living in a community, a set of values and moral beliefs need to be known and internalized at the level of the individual, and, in this sense, education is playing a lead role, as its goal is the modeling of the students in order to improve their social integration. This integration cannot take place without the existence of prosocial behavior, without respecting social norms, and combating negative behavior and the formation of moral characters are urgently required by society.

Moral education at primary school through religious texts represents a research theme of interest, imposed by the needs of the factors involved in education, an actual theme from the point of view of science and pedagogical practice.

Part I

Theoretical foundations

Chapter 1. Historical milestones and conceptual approaches in moral education

The first chapter of the thesis examines the concepts related to moral education, as well as their evolution over time. Through a historical approach, the stages of shaping terms in the field of morality are analyzed, revealing the thoughts of the most representative thinkers. Starting with names such as Homer, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Democritus, Socrates, Plato, known as the first sages to deal with the problem of morality, the chapter reveals theories of representative authors such as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Dewey, Nietzsche.

The concepts associated with moral education are analyzed both in relation to the opinions of thinkers of distant periods, such as Buchanan (1882) or Bouglé (1922), and through the prism of recent conceptions of contemporary researchers.

The chapter also presents some theories of moral development, such as the models proposed by Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, John Rawls or Carol Gilligan, analyzing the similarities, but also the differences between them. Then, it details aspects regarding the fundamental components in the orientation and structuring of moral education (principles, finalities, content), and the first chapter ends with an X-ray of the education systems in some countries of Europe, but also of the Romanian education system, from the perspective of moral education.

Chapter 2. Moral education in primary school

The second chapter is devoted to moral education in primary school, capturing the general characteristics of the little student and describing the mechanisms by which the transition from cognitive assimilation of values to their internalization is carried out.

Then, the issue of alternative textbooks in primary education from the point of view of their formative value is addressed, but an analysis of the methods frequently used in small classes with the aim of moral training of students is also carried out. Moral conversation, moral storytelling, moral exercise, explanation, moral example, didactic play, or approval and disapproval are presented with their advantages and disadvantages.

Evaluation in moral education proves to be quite difficult and, according to some authors, it knows a particularly intellectual approach (Monada et al., 2020). Its difficulty arises from the fact that internal phenomena, of a subjective nature, cannot be observed.

The chapter finally presents the current trends in the approach of didactic strategies in moral education, proving that researchers around the world are concerned about this segment.

Chapter 3. Moral education and religious texts for children

The third chapter of the thesis establishes the connection between moral education and religious texts for children. It emphasizes the complementarity between moral and religious education and presents the advantages of reading religious texts from the perspective of moral development. Also, an analysis of the old Romanian literature is carried out, showing that with the first narrators (Moldavian chroniclers), the first moralists appeared.

The chapter then delimits children's literature from the rest of literature, presenting its main characteristics and capturing its evolution, both worldwide and nationally. Finally, the types of texts that can be educational resources are analyzed both in curricular approaches (in the discipline of Romanian Language and Literature or in other disciplines) and in extracurricular approaches.

Anchoring research in a thorough theoretical substantiation gives the conducted studies validity, the hypotheses and research questions being placed in a clear, logical and coherent context. A correct and efficient choice of methods by which data are collected, as well as the construction of research tools fully consistent with what we want to measure and understand, is directly linked to a good documentation on the investigated phenomena.

Part II

Psychopedagogical research on moral education in primary school through religious texts

The investigative approach aimed to identify key elements regarding the use of religious text by primary school teachers, for the development of conduct and moral conscience in fourth graders and experimental identification of elements able to support the internalization of religious values through didactic activities in the discipline of Romanian Language and Literature.

In the research undertaken by us, we used a methodological system of data collection, analysis and interpretation, as follows: the method of document research, used in all five

studies, the interview method, used in the preliminary study, the survey method, on which studies 1, 2 and 3 were supported, and in study 4, the experimental one, we used the method of tests and other written evaluation samples, the method of analyzing the products of students' activity, the method of observation and the psychopedagogical experiment. Methods of statistical analysis of research data are found in all five studies conducted.

Therefore, starting from the beliefs of specialists that a research topic is more effectively thorough through an approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), our research was supported on a combination of methods, concretized in five studies, which complemented each other in order to create an overview, but also significant details regarding moral education in primary education.

Preliminary study

Challenges and opportunities in moral education in Romanian primary school

It was conducted on the basis of the answers to the questions from the interview guide administered to inspectors, school directors and school counselors, during January – March 2022, and aimed to identify the opinions of teachers in leading positions on moral education in the Romanian school, in order to identify directions or priorities of research and to develop the necessary data collection tools in the next stages of research.

This study aimed to outline an overview of the status of moral education in Romanian school. Using the interview, we aimed to identify the concepts of school inspectors/directors / counselors regarding some general aspects of moral education in the Romanian school: the importance it is given, its level, efficiency and quality, the involvement of teachers, the difficulties they face, as well as possible solutions.

The data collected in this study reveal a set of information related to the conceptions of teachers in a leadership position (inspector/director) and those directly involved in the moral training of children (school counselors) on the place of moral education in the Romanian school, an aspect targeted by the first research question. Although moral education is perceived to be of major importance, it is recognised that it is not in the position it would be necessary to occupy. The most obvious causes that led to the present situation, in the conceptions of the interview participants, are: the influence of the online environment and the

mass-media, the lack of models, the inappropriate entourage in which the children meet, as well as the low degree of involvement of the family.

It can be seen that the perceptions of teachers converge towards the image of a moral education of low level and efficiency, this state of affairs being motivated by the reality that many children are deprived of the guidance and support of parents who either go abroad to-support the family, or they work a lot in the country, and the lack of time does not allow them to get involved in the training of the little ones. Also blamed is the exaggerated permissiveness that some children enjoy, considered to be one of the causes of the low efficiency of moral education.

Regarding regulatory documents, half of the interviewees believe that they touch only tangentially moral education, not being an effective support of teachers in relation to the situations they face in the classroom, and the other half declare themselves satisfied with them.

Despite all these factors that diminish the effectiveness of teachers' steps towards the moral formation of children, in the case of the next research objective, the variety of existing conceptions regarding the degree of involvement of teachers in the moral education of students, shows that most do it responsibly, 5 of the interview participants claiming that teachers assume the moral education of their students to a large and very large extent.

The answers obtained refer to the organization and development of educational programs and projects, extracurricular activities aimed at the moral development of students, organizing training courses on this segment for teachers involved in moral education, advising teachers, offering examples of good practices, as ways to improve the moral education achieved in school.

Regarding the difficulties faced by the teaching staff in achieving moral education, it is especially highlighted the low degree of involvement of the family in the moral formation of children, the influence exerted by the online environment and the mass media on them, as well as the attitude that some parents display towards school and towards teachers, a highly loaded curriculum that does not allow teachers a detailed approach to moral problems. Also, as solutions to these difficulties, aspects such as changes both at the curricular level (moral education treated in a separate discipline, increasing the number of hours allocated to activities aimed at the moral development of students, the existence of adequate resources), as well as at the level of parents (more rigorous control of children's daily schedule, dedication of a longer time to them), or of teachers (being necessary for them to constitute moral models for students and to maintain a closer collaboration with parents).

The answers show that a quality absolutely necessary for every educator is to have a moral character himself. It is also necessary to have a good professional training and to be an example for its students at all times.

The conclusions of this preliminary study require deepening some aspects such as the difficulties encountered by teachers in the moral training of students, the people on whom teachers rely in carrying out this endeavor, the efficiency of moral education, the degree of involvement of parents, the moral values that an educator must prove, in order to constitute a moral model for the little ones. Thus, the following research directions are outlined and they orient us to the questioning of teachers in relation to the concerned aspects.

Study I

Moral education in primary school: teacher training, achievement contexts, support persons, difficulties and efficiency proposals

It was conducted between March and June 2022 and aimed to identify the opinions of teachers and for primary education on initial and continuous training in the field of moral education, their degree of involvement in achieving the objectives of this dimension of education, the obstacles encountered in achieving moral education and ways to overcome them. The study was a natural continuation of the investigations carried out in the preliminary study and aimed to identify the opinions of teachers for primary education on some aspects that influence the daily activity at the department in terms of moral education of children.

The results reveal important phenomena related to the training of teachers as a moral trainer, the support from others in carrying out this mission, the problems they face and how they could be remedied.

In relation to the needs and expectations of teachers for primary education in terms of training on the moral education segment, those surveyed believe that this aspect represents a weak link of Romanian education. They claim that the initial preparation does not fully help in the formation of the consciousness and moral conduct of the student (50.73% of primary school teachers claim that they are spoken only tangentially about moral education, within disciplines or courses that pursued other ends). The lack of continuous training programs leads them to inform themselves on the problems related to the moral education of children (70% of respondents say they had to search for information), and the supply of resources in order to design activities aimed at the moral training of students is unsatisfactory (as claimed

by 40.9% of the surveyed teachers), aspects also revealed by the statistically significant differences between the different training modalities.

If teachers with more than 25 years of experience have a higher degree of satisfaction in relation to the initial training on the moral dimension of education, the opinions of those at the beginning of their career show that the current Romanian education values less the training of teachers in the field of moral education than in the communist period.

The same phenomenon can be observed with regard to participation in continuing education courses. The age, seniority and teaching degrees of the teachers determine statistically significant differences between the young teachers, dissatisfied with the offer of training courses on moral education topics, and the elderly, whose degree of satisfaction is higher. It is noted that in the case of teachers with low work experience, between 0 and 5 years, the interest for participation in training courses is low.

Instead, the need for self instruction is a general one among teachers, not influenced in any way by variables such as age work experience, level of studies, didactic degrees, coordinated class or environment in which teachers work.

Another research question concerns the contexts of moral education in school, with emphasis on taking responsibility for it. From the answers of the teachers we learned that the school attaches a major importance to the moral side of education and that the teachers assume responsibility in this regard (65.6% of the respondents have expressed total agreement). However, in pedagogical circles the debate on issues related to the moral education of students is neglected, and the introduction to the framework of a discipline explicitly aimed at moral development would help teachers, as claimed by 67.9% of respondents. The fact that there are no statistically significant differences according to age, work experience, teaching degrees, the class they coordinate, the level of education or the environment in which the teachers carry out the activity, underlines the idea of unity in terms of teachers' responsibility, of dissatisfaction with the curricular regulations regarding moral education, of moderation in relation to the assignment of responsibility in a great deal to the family.

In order to find out who supports teachers in the moral education of children, teachers had both predefined variants and the opportunity to provide answer variants themselves. Thus, the director of the school took the first position in the elections that the respondents did (30.39%), followed by the religion teacher, and in the last place appears the school counselor. Moreover, in this case, there are differences depending on the didactic degree, the debutants

feeling the director less close in their mission to form the consciousness and conduct of students than those with Grade I.

We were also interested to find out to what extent parents' concern for the moral behavior of the child is manifested. Analyzing the results obtained, they outlined the conclusion that the family is especially interested in the ratings obtained by the child, and aspects regarding his moral development are in second place. In this case, differences arise between urban and rural areas, where the percentage of those interested in school results is higher and those interested in behavior is lower than those from urban areas. The phenomenon underlines the fact that in the urban environment there are more often situations related to the inappropriate behavior of students, the parents being, on the one hand, more interested in this aspect, on the other hand, more often asked by the teacher to have a discussion on this topic.

Regarding the difficulties faced by primary school teachers in the moral education of children, shortcomings are highlighted regarding the influence of the family (wrong education, lack of parents, their wrong attitude towards school and towards teachers, etc.), the lack of models, the excessive and inappropriate use of technology, but also aspects related to the school (insufficient or ineffective resources, deficiencies in the activity of teachers, etc.).

The efficiency proposals made by teachers refer to a better link between school and family, to the improvement of teachers, to the introduction of a distinct discipline in the framework aimed only at the moral training of students.

Regarding the qualities that validate the teacher as a moral model for students and the range of moral models of teachers for primary education, the answers highlight traits that relate to both the professional side (serious, involved, responsible, fair, persevering, gentle, etc.) and the personal one (tolerant, understanding, altruistic, generous, empathetic, etc.). The teachers, in turn, had as moral models the parents, especially the mother, Jesus, associated with the representative of the Church, the priest, and only then a teacher.

Therefore, the study "Moral education in primary school: teacher training, support persons, difficulties and proposals for efficiency, moral models" highlights the not very privileged position on which moral education is located in Romania, outlining an image in which teachers, although they assume responsibility in the moral training of their students, often encounter an insufficient initial and continuous training in relation to the reality encountered in the classroom, the low degree of involvement of parents, difficulties related to insufficient resources, lack of time, a curriculum that does not emphasize enough values. The

moral education of children is viewed with concern by teachers, who find that they are not in the proper place and are not moving in the desired direction.

Study 2

Didactic peculiarities in the realization of moral education in Romanian primary school

Also based on the answers to the questionnaire administered, we conducted Study II, which aimed to identify the opinions of teachers in relation to didactic practices regarding the moral education of students (frequency and efficiency of using methods and teaching aids, methods of evaluation).

Undertaken out of the need to identify detail images from educational practice relating to the formation of consciousness and moral conduct in young schoolchildren, this study reveals aspects related to the support-elements in the design of activities, the use of didactic methods and means, the evaluation within this dimension of education, the contexts of achieving moral education in primary education.

The research presents relevant details from the current activity carried out in Romanian schools, offering a picture of the reality in which, often, the teachers do not enjoy a diversity of resources that help them in the design of activities aimed at the moral training of students, and difficulties in assessing the progress of students imply the uncertainty of teachers regarding the effectiveness of the strategies used.

The answers obtained lead to the conclusion that moral education has a low level of attention from decision-makers, so teachers are in the situation to use their own experience (73%) (in the case of those with longer work experience) or that of colleagues, who provide examples of good practices (81.60%), as well as the sites dedicated to them (73%), where examples of the work of other teachers can also be found. This fact is explained by the low supply of materials available to them, on the Romanian market there are extremely few methodological guides and specialized journals dealing with aspects of moral education.

Research data show that the age of teachers influences the choice of documentation sources. Very young teachers, in the age category 20-25 years, use methodological guides and specialized journals more than the other categories, being able to access international online publications related to this aspect. Thus, they are in a more advantageous position compared to teachers over 55 years old, trained in the period when physical publications predominated.

If we talk about the use of good practice examples, variables such as age, didactic degree and the environment in which teachers work are elements that influence their choices. Teachers with more years of experience (15-25 years and over 25 years) rely more on the experience of colleagues than teachers with less work experience. The same is evidenced by the teaching degrees, as expected, those with Grade I or II use best practice examples more than their debutant or full-time peers. Differences also arise in terms of the environment in which teachers work, teachers in urban areas using to a greater extent the experience of colleagues than those in rural areas.

In the case of methodological guides and specialized journals, the percentage of those who use them increases as the level of studies increases. This phenomenon reinforces the belief that the higher training of teachers facilitates their access to international publications.

Regarding the frequency of designing training sequences on moral aspects in subjects that do not explicitly target the moral training of students, the research reveals that most teachers (about 61%) design at least one training sequence per day, and almost 28% of them do it every class hour. The fact that there are no statistical differences in relation to the age, seniority, didactic degree, level of training, the class in which the teacher works or the environment in which they carry out their work emphasizes the unity of responses in terms of the frequency of these sequences.

Research data also show that, for the moral training of students, teachers most often use moral conversation (57.2%) and moral example (54.9%), followed by explanatory reading (46.3%) and didactic play (46.1%), and the method used most rarely is dramatization. The choices are justified by the fact that the two most preferred methods do not require long time to prepare and use them, while being applicable both in lessons, breaks or various extracurricular activities. Through moral conversation, teachers easily exploit any situation with moral potential arising in the activity with children, especially since, in primary classes, the development of students' communication skills is at the center of the teacher's concerns. Also, the moral example proves its effectiveness in the case of small schoolchildren, when the child is inclined to copy certain behaviors, to imitation. That is why teachers need to ensure that students are provided with role models that are worthy to follow. On the other hand, the literary text is a good pretext to discuss the moral aspects masterfully introduced into the content, especially when it is approached using it is an explanatory reading, to clarify any confusion or vagueness. In fact, literature is often the basis from which moral conversation and moral example are started. Given the age of the students to whom it is addressed, the didactic game is a method that effectively leads the student to progress, in a

playful way, creating an atmosphere in which the child feels relaxed and unburdened by the rigidity of an ordinary learning activity. Research data show that teachers from rural areas use explanatory reading more often than those from urban areas, children's proximity to the literary text being higher in the case of students from villages than those from cities, who have at their disposal, besides literature, other cultural concerns (performances, movies, theaters, concerts, etc.). The didactic game is also used more in rural areas than in urban areas, and the study reveals that there are significant differences in the case of this method and depending on the class to which it is applied (in preparatory students it is used more often than in those in older classes). Moral storytelling is another method that is more often resorted to in the early years of school (preparatory and first grades), as in the case of combined classes.

More than three quarters of primary school teachers (76.50%) resort to observing the behavior of some people when they aim to achieve the goals of moral education, followed by its analysis (73%), and the most rarely used method is mimicking the behaviors of some people (11.10%). Observing and analyzing how one behaves has the advantage that it is always accessible to teachers, who easily find behaviors to subject children to attention. Mimicking behaviors does not resonate with teachers' preferences, this method assuming imitation, without the schoolchild being emotionally involved, or, the affective and volitional sides have a decisive contribution in moral education.

Analyzing the choices made by the respondents in relation to their level of education, we found that interest in the use of observation of behaviors decreases with increasing levels of studies, while, in the case of practicing behaviors, we observed a percentage increase with the increase of level of education this phenomenon underlines the tendency of modern pedagogy to use action-based methods rather than those that involve observation and analysis of certain aspects.

The statistical analyses carried out show that the work experience of teachers influences statistically significantly the use of observation of behaviors, those with little experience more often resorting to this method/technique of training moral behavior in students than others, and in the case of analyzing some behaviors, the research shows that it is preferred to a greater extent by more experienced teachers over their colleagues with less experience.

We found that films and readings occupy the first places in teachers' choices (83% and 76.50% respectively), while drawings and photographs are in the last two positions (26% and 19.50% respectively). Although children today are very attracted to computer games, in

the case of their use in moral education, only a little over half of the respondents say that they are among the favorites of children. This aspect can also highlight a low offer on the Romanian market of educational games aimed at the moral development of children in primary education. In the case of readings, the percentages increase with increasing age of respondents (from 64% for those under 25 to 87.3% for those over 55).

If in the case of reading, research shows that teachers with higher seniority use them more often than those with lower seniority, photos and boards are preferred in a greater extent of those with the least experience, of 0-5 years, compared to the others.

Didactic degrees are another variable that influences the use of didactic means. Didactic games and movies are preferred by teachers with more advanced didactic degree in a greater measure than the debutants or those with a definitive as a teacher in education degree. Also in the case of these two teaching aids, there were highlighted differences between those working in urban areas and those in rural schools, the former using them more than the others. Analyzing the use of boards as teaching aids in the moral education of children, we found that debutants and those with a definitive as a teacher in education degree use them more often than those with a degree I and II, the same phenomenon being observed in those who work in the preparatory class or in the combined classes, in front of their peers who work in other classes.

The next research question refers to the methods by which teachers evaluate the activities of students in the field of moral education. The data show that written evidence is the first place in teachers' preferences regarding the methods by which teachers evaluate students' activities in the field of moral education, and systematic observation is the last place, a method that requires consistency and a relatively long period of time to be put into practice. As for the portfolio, there were highlighted differences depending on the environment in which the teachers work, those from urban areas relying more often on this method of assessment than those in rural areas.

We were also interested to find out how teachers evaluate, positively or negatively, the students' behaviors. The answers obtained highlight terms such as "Bravo!", "Very good!", but students often also receive rewards in applause, highlights in front of the class or materialized in diplomas. A large part of the teachers express their satisfaction, pride or joy when the student has the expected behavioral manifestations. As negative feedback, teachers very often use negation ("I do not like it.", "It's not good.", "You didn't do it right."), but they also show their disappointment, especially those who work in the countryside. Many senior teachers tend to encourage students to correct misbehavior.

The results of our research show that most teachers organize extracurricular activities with moral education theme (77.10%), invite some prominent people to talk to students about moral values (63.50%) and turn to watching movies or shows with moral topic (55.80%). Contests on moral issues turned out to be the least used (29.40%). These preferences are justified by the fact that extracurricular activities have gained momentum lately, their effectiveness being recognized (Aburakawa, 2023; Assante & Lisan, 2023; Bayanova et al., 2024; Birhan, 2021; Bonkalo et al., 2023; Fantana, 2020b; Fluharty et al., 2023; Hidayati, 2020; Opris & Opris, 2015; Rindrayani, 2020; Schaefer et al., 2024; Sirovina et al., 2023; Soler et al., 2022; Suartama et al., 2020; Van Der Ley et al., 2022). Moreover, they explicitly target the formation of positive behaviors and relationships between children, aspects that go beyond the informational dimension. The last place ranking of competitions is explained by the difficulties of evaluation in the framework of moral education. The facility of organizing meetings between students and personalities, whose words produce a strong echo in the consciousness of children at this age, as well as the popularity enjoyed by the use of films and performances in moral education (Cheung, 2008; Laugier, 2021; MacAllister, 2024; Rekabtalaei, 2018; Wijayanti and Rukiyati, 2021), to which is added the enthusiasm with which the little ones participate explains the teachers' preference for these activities.

Not the same popularity is enjoyed by organizing competitions on moral topics and conducting interdisciplinary lessons with the teacher of religion. In the case of competitions, on the one hand, their design requires time and creativity on the part of teachers, and on the other hand, the competition is not seen by all teachers as a way to contribute to the moral formation of children. The low degree of collaboration with the classroom religion teacher shows that primary school teachers either do not recognize the potential contribution of their peers in the moral formation of students, or the religious diversity of children leads them not to approach such activities.

The environment in which teachers work influences the extent to which skits are organized with subjects from this dimension of education, they being preferred especially by teachers from rural areas. Also depending on the level of education, there were highlighted differences, extracurricular activities being more often organized by those with higher education than others, while teachers with bachelor studies are more interested in watching movies and shows with moral themes than their peers.

Activities that explicitly aim at the formation of conscience and moral conduct in primary school students are organized by most teachers with a medium to high frequency, more often in urban areas than in rural areas. It is highlighted a positive correlation between

the frequency of carrying out these activities and the seniority of the teachers, teachers with more experience organizing them more often by comparison with their younger peers.

Study 3

The use of religious texts for children in moral education carried out in primary school

Since the doctoral thesis aims to identify ways for a better capitalization of the potentialities of religious texts in the achievement of moral education in school, we conducted a study to help us identify the place they give and the ways of using it by teachers for the success of moral education. Called "The use of religious texts for children in moral education carried out in primary school", the study was also conducted during March-June 2022.

The third study reveals important data related to teachers' opinions regarding the moral message of texts from school textbooks for primary education, the use of storytelling in different subjects, the sources of moral stories, as well as the motivations of the use of religious texts in the moral education of children.

Analyzing the research data, we can say that, in general, teachers have the ability to evaluate the content of textbooks. Our study shows a moderate (43.4%) to medium (40.88%) degree of satisfaction of teachers, this reality justifying both the insertion of the moral story in the activities carried out in different subjects of study, and the fact that teachers are forced to look for material resources with additional moral value, so that the shortcomings of the current textbooks related to the formative aspects of education to be somehow remedied. The results of this study also highlight the fact that the degree of satisfaction of the respondents is influenced both by their level of studies and by the class they teach. Thus, primary school teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees report more dissatisfaction with the texts in textbooks, in terms of their moral value, than respondents with a lower level of training. Also, the statistical analyses carried out show that the degree of satisfaction with the moral message of the textbooks for primary education is higher in the combined classes than in the others, and the lowest degree of satisfaction is expressed by the teachers who coordinate the first class.

The data obtained show that teachers often use moral storytelling in primary education in the disciplines of Personal Development (79.9%), Civic Education (71.5%) and Communication in Romanian Language/Romanian Language and Literature (52.2%). If in

the case of the first two, these choices are justified by the fact that the specific aims of the above-mentioned subjects are partly related to the moral training of students, within the discipline Communication in Romanian Language (for preparatory, first and second classes) and Romanian Language and Literature (for the third and fourth grades), in fulfilling the objectives pursued by this object of study, the literary text is frequently used as a support for the activities carried out, so that, by using the moral story, the teachers can pursue both the achievement of these ends and the moral formation of the students. It is also noted that each discipline has a well-defined role in the use of moral storytelling in the moral education of children, an aspect highlighted by the statistically significant differences between them. Statistical analyses show that, in the case of the personal development discipline, moral storytelling is used more frequently in urban areas than in rural areas. The didactic degree of the respondents also influences the frequency of using the moral story in the subjects of History and Civic Education, teachers with higher didactic degrees turning to it more often than others.

The study shows that the sources that teachers most often turn to when they need moral stories are books that contain moral-civic stories (89.90%), but more than half of the teachers participating in the research consult story books with moral-religious substrate (55.10%), an aspect that confirms the importance that this type of reading has in the harmonious development of the child (Opris, 2010). Data processing shows that the school textbook is a support in the procurement of moral stories especially for teachers who work in rural areas, highlighting the fact that those in urban areas access certain publications more easily. Also, statistically significant differences depending on the age of teachers and the environment in which they work also recorded concerning the use of the Bible and the textbook as a source of moral stories. Teachers between 0 and 15 years of work experience use the Bible as a source of moral stories significantly more often than their peers over 25 years of work experience. In rural areas, primary school teachers rely significantly more on textbooks in procuring moral stories than those in urban areas.

Another point worth mentioning is that about half of teachers who are over 25 years of work experience compose moral stories. Thanks to the accumulated experience, they create texts according to the goals they pursue and the peculiarities of the students to whom they will be addressed. Thus, another aspect that our research confirms is the need for an initial and continuous training of teachers in order to allow them to use didactic strategies in a contextualized manner (Opris, 2020).

Regarding the motivations that lead teachers to use religious texts in moral education in primary school, the statistical analyses carried out show that the proximity to reality of these texts represented one of the motivations often expressed, as well as the fact that the respondents consider themselves people who appreciate and promote religious values. Also it was highlighted the fact that intrinsic motivations are stronger with regard to the decision to use religious texts for the purpose of moral training of students.

The answers regarding the techniques by which moral storytelling is used in the evaluation were analyzed statistically to obtain the answer to the last research question of this study. The data demonstrate that the most used techniques are dialogue with questions asked by the teacher and illustration through a drawing or collage of the text message. Statistically significant differences between urban and rural areas (in favour of rural areas) were recorded in the case of retelling by a student and dramatization, as evaluation techniques that support moral storytelling.

Study 4

Influence of religious texts for children on the internalization of moral values in primary school students

The last study, conducted between October 1, 2022 and June 15, 2023, aimed to identify the formative effects the integration of the religious text in didactic strategies in the discipline of Romanian Language and Literature on fourth graders.

In the intervention carried out by us, included in the present study, the central method (experiment) was accompanied by the method of tests, systematic observation, sociometric methods, case study, interview and analysis of the products of the students' activity, in order to obtain firm, reliable conclusions.

This latest study was intended to present the aspects circumscribed to the psychopedagogical intervention undertaken, through which it aimed to test whether the implementation of a formative program based on the capitalization of the religious text in the teaching-learning strategies in the discipline Romanian Language and Literature, in the fourth grade, leads to an increase in the level of formation of moral values and the improvement of social relations between students.

In the case of the hypothesis, which refers to the fact that the application of a formative program that is based on the integration of religious texts in teaching-learning-assessment in the discipline Romanian Language and Literature, in the

fourth grade, leads to an increase in the level of assimilation of moral values (love and affection, honesty, kindness, spirit of sacrifice, compassion), the results obtained by the test method show that the formative program had a positive influence in this respect, the statistically significant differences between the experimental and control classes, both in the final test and in the retest, leading to the confirmation of this hypothesis. Moreover, revealing how children perceived these activities, demonstrates that the texts had a positive impact on their mood and were an effective and enjoyable way to achieve moral values.

The values obtained in the independent t test, for situations where the data distribution was normal, and in the Mann -Whitney U test, if the data did not show a normal distribution, for each of the 4 pairs of classes, highlight that the intervention positively influenced the results of the experimental classes certainly, given the values of the threshold of significance lower than 0.05, in each of the analyzed cases. Also, the fact that, when calculating the size of the effect, the obtained values show a strong or medium effect, supports the claim that this specific hypothesis is confirmed.

In relation to the hypothesis that states that the use of religious texts as a support in teaching-learning the Romanian Language and Literature support the improvement of the relations between the students, in the social groups of the classes to which the independent variable is applied, highlighted by individual sociometric indices, it was tested by collecting data and calculating the values of individual sociometric indices at the beginning of the experiment and at its end, followed by their comparison. As the results show, there are increases in the sociometric indices of the intensity of the sympathy of the collective and decreases in the intensity of the antipathy of the collective, this fact testifying to an improvement in the relations between the members of the group. Indices of preferential status show that the positions of students within the social group improved during the experiment, reducing the number of students rejected and increasing the number of those accepted. Also, sociometric analyses show that, for students who registered a large number of rejections in the initial period, it decreased significantly at the end of the approach. This is the case for students M. I. L (from 11 initial rejections to 3 final), L. I. C (from 7 to 5), from class E1, G. Y and O. D. I. from class E2 (from 9 to 4, respectively from 5 to 1), C. D. (from 19 initial rejections to 11 final), D. S (from 8 to 3), from class E3 and the student M. L., from class E 4 (from 14 rejections to 8). The same hypothesis is confirmed by the answers given by the teacher in the interview at the end of the experiment, according to which all the students who constituted case studies are more liked by their colleagues at the end of the experiment than at the beginning of it.

Analyzing the number of isolated students, in a comparative manner initially-finally, the research data do not show an improvement in their acceptance in the class group. As stated by the teachers who coordinated the students with whom the experiment was conducted, during the interview, these cases proved to be children with serious social and relationship problems, and for their integration we consider that a continuation of the research would be necessary, the present approach being insufficient. Therefore, given all these aspects, we can say that hypothesis number 2 is partially confirmed.

Increases in the values of group sociometric indices, with the exception of the preferential stability index, which stagnated in class E3 and the integration index, which did not increase in any class, show that the third specific hypothesis formulated is partially confirmed. The fact that the group cohesion index increased by values between 0.03 and 0.17, the group coherence index recorded differences between the initial and the final ranging between 0.79 and 4.26, the persons association index increased by values between 0.04 and 0.17, and the preferential stability index by 0.03-0.04 units demonstrates that the application of didactic strategies involving religious texts in moral formation leads to the increase of cohesion and coherence of the social group of the class, as well as the balance of relations between the members of the student collective. Instead, the formative program proved insufficient in terms of increasing the integration index, so the hypothesis that the application of didactic strategies involving religious texts leads to increases in the collective indices of preferential stability, cohesion, coherence of the social group of the class, association between the members of the student collective and integration is partially confirmed.

The results obtained by direct observation of the behavior, as well as those obtained by case study confirm the hypothesis that the capitalization of religious texts in order to assimilate moral values (honesty, kindness, spirit of sacrifice, compassion, love and affection) leads to the improvement of some aspects circumscribed to the moral behavior of the students in the sub-sample subjected to observation. All students followed recorded the improvement of behavior, an aspect revealed by the scores obtained in the evaluation grids and confirmed by case study, both by the teacher and by the parents, but especially by the students themselves, who demonstrate in the composition analyzed that they are aware of their own change.

Taking into account the fact that two of the four specific hypotheses were confirmed by the analysis of the results obtained from the experiment, and the other two were partially confirmed, we can state that religious texts has a positive influence in terms of moral development of fourth graders. Also, the investigation of the opinions of the teachers who

carried out the activities of the formative program shows that the inclusion of the religious text as a support text in the didactic approach to the Romanian Language and Literature effectively supports, beyond the formation of the competences pursued by studying this discipline, the acquisition of the moral values absolutely necessary for the formation of desirable behavior.

Both the results obtained and the satisfaction of the students involved in the research, who enthusiastically received the activities, confirm that the use of religious texts in the Romanian Language and Literature classes is an effective way to contribute to the assimilation of values, in a form agreed by students, within the reach of teachers. The materials used in the research (tests, observation grid, activities carried out, etc.), as well as the detailed description of the entire approach provide benchmarks for teachers and researchers interested in the analyzed aspects. Last but not least, the positive impact of texts with religious content, highlighted by our research, can be extended, through the development of extensive programs, covering the entire period allocated to primary education (and not only), for the results to turn into major echoes in the consciousness and moral behavior of those who will constitute the next generation.

This research confirms other international researches that support the importance of literature in the moral education of children (Pantik, 2006; Widyahening & Hum, 2016; Arthur, 2014). It also confirms the study conducted by Desheng (2004), which claims that the literary text can serve as a pedagogical resource for the training and moral development of students.

If Arafik (2020) demonstrates that the integration of moral values in the study of literature effectively contributes to their assimilation by primary school students, the study carried out by us extends the research also on communication and language elements, given the specificity of the discipline Romanian Language and Literature, in the fourth grade, in Romania.

This research is also complementary to that carried out by Birhan et al. (2021), which shows that stories in which the characters are animals turn out to be very suitable for teaching children about right and wrong. As our research data shows, religious texts are a source of values that can serve as a support in the moral education of primary school students, this aspect being a novelty in the scientific space.

Regarding the positive effects of literature on relationships within the group of students, this study confirms and continues the research conducted by Gasser et al., in 2024. Beyond highlighting the fact that these religious texts lead to an improvement in the students'

position within the social group of the class, there is also an increase in the cohesion and coherence of the group, as well as in the quality of relations between its members.

Although the research carried out has led to the collection of data and the formulation of relevant conclusions, with both theoretical and practical impact, some of its limits must be taken into account.

Only teachers from Romania were included in the investigations, but the results also apply to other countries where the interest shown to moral education achieved in primary education is similar, which value storytelling as a method of moral education, where official textbooks and other relevant materials are made available to teachers to support the formative side of education at this age.

We also take into account the degree of subjectivity of the interviewed and questioned teachers, the answers being the reflection of their personal vision on the investigated aspects. For this reason, an extension of the research may further support the generalization of the results.

Also, insufficient time is seen as another limit to research. Moral procurement crystallizes and stabilizes over time, and the period in which we conducted the formative intervention allowed only partly the manifestation of the effects that religious texts have on the moral development of children.

As future directions of research, we consider the deepening of some investigated aspects, such as models of effective evaluation in the field of moral education, a problem that still needs exploration, studies in this direction being insufficient in relation to the needs suggested by the teachers. Another possible development of the research is the investigation of other types of strategies for the moral development of primary school students, such as that based on the use of films.

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