

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALLY DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUES OF STUDENTS IN LITERATURE TEACHING**

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**Abstract.** This paper emphasizes the effects of teaching literature in the younger grades of primary school in the context of the development of socially desirable behavior of students. The aim of this research was to determine how much literature content for children, which is the part of the curriculum for pupils attending classes from the first to the fourth grade of the elementary school, with the application of adequate teaching methods and affirmation of socially desirable values, contribute to the development and nurturing of socially desirable behaviour of students. The research can be marked as *ex post facto*, with the application of a descriptive method and a survey procedure. The findings of the research show that the texts of children's literature, with adequate methodical procedure during their interpretation, contribute to the development of socially desirable characteristics and values of students.

**Keywords:** socially desirable behavior of students; social values of students; teaching literature; methodical behavior of teachers

### **Introduction**

Literary and artistic texts and works of literature for children, which are presented through valid, good-quality classes, have a significant impact on the socialization and humanization of students' personalities. They also contribute to the development of virtues, moral understanding, positive habits and socially desirable student' behavior. The teaching of literature in the younger grades of primary school determines the educational activities of the school and contributes to the development of the overall potential of students, their characteristics and values. The educational influences of the school are very complex and conditioned by numerous factors. The main intention of this paper was to determine in what way and to what extent, the methodical behavior of teachers in processing texts of literature for children in Serbian language classes determines the development of socially desirable behavior of students in elementary school classes.

The research within this paper contributed to emphasizing the importance of quality methodological behavior of teachers. It should be appropriate to the age and immanent nature of literary and artistic texts. Such actions of teachers will further strengthen the need of students to read literary works, but also complement the educational effect of the school on their behavior.

### **Theoretical approach to the problem**

The positive behavior of an individual towards other people determines their satisfaction and quality of life, regardless of whether they are motivated for such behavior for personal gain, or the well-being of other people. In order to predict how another person will behave (we also mean students), it is necessary to understand what motivates one prosocial procedure. If the procedure is motivated by selfish intentions, one cannot speak of prosocial behavior.

The definition of the term prosocial behavior, as well as related terms, creates certain doubts and disagreements among theorists. It involves actions and activities that contribute to the well-being of other people. However, such a determination does not provide any explanation for the share of personal gain that someone makes by behaving prosocially, how much sacrifice or what kind of reward he expects. These are precisely the dilemmas that theorists argue about.

Prosocial behavior is most often defined as social behavior that contributes to the well-being of other individuals or groups, regardless of the degree and type of personal gain, sacrifice or renunciation, ie. with minimal possibility of either material or social reward (Brayan & London 1970; Staub 1978; Eisenberg & Mussen 1989). This behavior is good and beneficial for the social group (Strayer & Noel 1987).

In the broadest sense, social behavior manifests itself as positive or negative. Positive social behavior is defined as positive social interaction, or as socially accepted, that is, positively reinforcing behavior, and negative social behavior is defined as negative social interaction (La Greca and Stark 1986).

Since socially desirable behavior is what is expected in relationships between individuals, it is socially responsible behavior. As Spasenović (2008) points out, socially responsible behavior is difficult to look at separately from prosocial behavior, because many aspects of positive social behavior are closely related.

The fact is that the teaching contents and the ways of their realization are the determinants of the educational outcomes and achievements of the students. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the teaching contents and the way of their processing determine the educational work of the school, as well as the overall developmental achievements of the students, from their cognitive to creative potentials.

Even today, although it has numerous competitors in alternative sources of knowledge and artistic experience, the literary and artistic text is a basic experiential potential that

contributes to the development of an individual's personality. Through examples from literature, students search for "the meaning of life", which is "the greatest need, but also the most difficult achievement" (Bettelheim 1979, 17). The problem of educational influences of literature is very complex and it does not offer simple and obvious solutions but numerous possibilities of action. We can assume that new scientific knowledge and experiences in teaching practice can contribute to using the benefits that literary works, and with them, the teaching of literature for children, provide.

The most prominent role of literary works in the educational work in primary school is their influence on the choice of *role models*. A role model can be a model for imitation and identification, but also a value reference point in an independent activity, harmonized according to one's own abilities and social conditions" (Havelka 1978, 132). This author further emphasizes that literary works fulfill this role by helping the student to recognize socially desirable and valuable ideals in their immediate social environment (school, family, neighborhood, homeland). Also, literary works contain models and thus directly expand and enrich the social world and the experience of students.

The latest literary-theoretical tendencies in the science of literature affirm pragmatic questions, for example, how literature affects its potential and specific readers. These tendencies imply expanding the possibilities of literary interpretation, by developing "in interpretive procedures all possible cultural discourses (cultural, understood in the broadest sense, e.g. ethical, racial, ethnic, sexual, etc.)" (Bužinjska and Markovski 2009, 27 – 45).

Quality teaching "is not satisfied with once acquired knowledge, skills and habits of its performer, because it leads to monotony, uniformity and stereotypes in actions, which cannot bring valid effects of educational work" (Ilić 2006, 21). Also, verbal interpretation of rules of conduct, through moralizing or preaching, does not contribute to the development of autonomous morality of the individual, which is internally conditioned. In this sense, numerous examples provided by the literary content seem unconstrained, do not offer finished rules and patterns, but offer different possibilities and freedom to choose attitudes and possible behaviors. Also, such examples point to the reasons and consequences of an individual's actions in different ways. Literary works get their aesthetic and artistic properties when they arouse the reader, his or her aesthetic experience, creativity and critical attitude. Examples in literature offer different solutions, do not "charge" advice, do not punish if you choose *for* or *against*, do not scold or rebuke.

Literary works of art present numerous moral dilemmas and conflicts in accordance with the famous bisexuality of moral judgments (moral good / moral evil), which puts us in a position to morally assess and decide. "Moral evaluation of the actions of literary heroes and the discovery of artistic messages are an integral part of literary and artistic reception and a strong factor of aesthetic experience" (Nikolić 1992, 17)

With a quality methodical organization of teaching activities, the teacher enables students to see the whole set of social, moral and psychological relations in the rich art world, to enrich and strengthen their own experience, which will help them understand real life situations more easily. This kind of receptiveness for literary simulations reinforces the degree of their moral action. With the help of artistic texts and teaching literature, it is possible to develop numerous virtues in students: justice, sincerity, friendship, solidarity, patriotism, dignity, positive tolerance, respect for social values, humanism, internationalism, and all other devotion to the good (Nikolić 1992). These virtues belong to a range of socially desirable values and are the basis of socially desirable behavior.

### **Research methodology**

Educational effects of teaching literature, for students from the first to the fourth grade of primary school, are *the subject* of this research, in the context of the development of their socially desirable behavior and the adoption of social values.

*The aim of the research* was to determine how many contents of children's literature, which are the part of the curriculum for students from the first to the fourth grade of primary school, with the application of adequate teaching methods and affirmation of socially desirable values, contribute to the development and nurturing of socially desirable students' behavior. This goal was actually realized through this research task, by which we wanted to determine the attitudes of teachers about the importance of children's literary texts for the development of socially desirable behavior of students in the younger grades of primary school. Teachers from fourteen primary schools participated in this empirical research (N = 175).

Based on the attitudes of teachers (on the possibilities and importance of children's literary texts for the development of their socially desirable behavior), factor analysis highlighted the following determinants (factors) for developing prosocial values in literature teaching: 1) The importance of prosocial behavior of students; 2) The importance of prosocial values (motives) of students; 3) Frequency of various methods of working in classes; 4) Ability to affirm socially desirable values by teachers; 5) Reading interests of students; 6) Educational means for encouraging socially desirable behavior of students (praise and rewards, punishments); 7) Organization of teaching activities.

### **Research results with discussion**

With the questionnaire for teachers, we wanted to find out what their attitudes are about the socially desirable characteristics and values of students, how much the school contributes to their development, in the teaching of literature. Then we wanted to determine how teachers organize activities when processing a literary text, what methods of work and educational tools they use in working with students, all in order to develop their socially desirable behavior. We also wanted to determine which approaches in the teaching of literature readers use when processing literary

texts, how they assess students' reading interests. It was also necessary to state how teachers assess their own ability, motivation and readiness to affirm, nurture and develop socially desirable values of students through the teaching of literature.

By factor analysis, the method of main components, with Varimax (Varimax with Kaiser) rotation of the main axes, we analyzed the question in which *teachers had to assess which socially desirable characteristics and values are developed in school through the teaching of literature*. Two factors have been singled out; 1) *the importance of prosocial behaviors* and 2) *the importance of prosocial values (motives)*. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

The first factor, the importance of prosocial behaviors, satisfies 36.9% of the variance with high level of being jaded from 0.406 to 0.863. The second factor, the importance of prosocial values (motives), satisfies a higher degree of variance of 52.8% with a level of being jaded of 0.372 to 0.749.

Based on these indicators, it is clear that teachers attach somewhat more importance to prosocial values (motives) than to prosocial behaviors. We assume that the reason could be that the teaching of literature has a greater effect on stabilizing the value system of students, and behavior is manifested through these values in different life situations, not only at school, but also outside it.

**Table 1.** Selected factors of importance of prosocial/socially desirable characteristics and values of students according to teachers' attitudes

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	3.686	36.863	36.863	3.686	36.863	36.863	3.041	30.415	30.415
2.	1.591	15.905	52.768	1.591	15.905	52.768	2.235	22.353	52.768

**Table 2.** Matrix of the structure of isolated factors

<i>Variable Components</i>	Importance of pro-social behaviour	Importance of pro-social values (motives)
Righteousness	.863	
Honesty	.856	
Honesty and love	.822	
Goodness and kindness	.803	
Camaraderie and friendship	.406	.406
Taking care of someone else		.749

Cooperation		.701
Helping		.670
Respect for others		.546
Sharing and giving something away		.372

Factor analysis further processes the issue of teachers' attitudes about *how often they use certain teaching methods*. One factor has been singled out. Namely, all estimates are grouped into one group, which we called *the frequency of methods* based on the structure matrix (Table 3). It is evident that teachers who use one of the possible methods more often use other methods as well, so we have teachers who use any method more often and less often, regardless of the type of method.

**Table 3.** Selected factors of frequency of use of teaching methods

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	1.849	30.818	30.818	1.849	30.818	30.818	1.849	30.818	30.818

The isolated factor, which we called *the frequency of the method*, satisfies 30.8% of the variance with the components being loaded on the variable from 0.322 to 0.701. As it can be seen from the structure matrix (Table 4), the lowest level of being loaded is with “logical methods” and “combined methods”, which means that teachers use these methods the least. The impression is that the texts are approached traditionally by using tried and tested methods, such as demonstrative, textual, dialogical and monological.

**Table 4.** Matrix of structure of isolated factors

Variable Components	Frequency of methods
Method of showing (demonstrative)	.701
Textual method	.699
Dialog method	.616
Logical method	.322
Monologue method	.455
Combined method	.424

Confirmation of this attitude can be seen in the following factor, where, according to attitudes of teachers, *the traditional approach* to teaching literature stands out as more significant, compared to modern approaches.

Factor analysis also analyzed the question in which teachers assessed how often they use certain approaches in the processing of children's literature texts. Two factors have been singled out. Namely, all assessments are grouped into two groups, which we named on the basis of the structure matrix: 1. Contemporary/creative and 2. Traditional approach. Thus, only one teacher assessment is different from the others (traditional approach) and it was used as a special score in the analyzes (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Selected factors of the frequency of using different approaches in teaching literature

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	2.027	40.544	40.544	2.027	40.544	40.544	2.027	40.541	40.541
2.	1.097	21.940	62.485	1.097	21.940	62.485	1.097	21.943	62.485

As it can be seen from the previous table, the first isolated factor that we called the “modern / creative approach” to literature teaching satisfies 40.5% of the variance with the level of being loaded from 0.572 to 0.766, while the second isolated factor “traditional approach” to literature teaching satisfies a much higher percentage of variance, 62.5% and a high level of being loaded of 0.821 (Tables 5 and 6). Based on these data, there is a clear tendency for 2/3 of the surveyed teachers to use the traditional approach to teaching literature, which is worrying, especially since we know from previous data that this is an educated, relatively “mature” and experienced population of teachers.

**Table 6.** Matrix of structure of isolated factors

<i>Variable Components</i>	<b>Modern/creative approaches</b>	<b>Traditional approach</b>
<b>Interpretative-analytical</b>	.766	
<b>Problematic-creative</b>	.766	
<b>Correlational-Integrational</b>	.704	
Programmed	.572	-.541
<b>Traditional</b>		.821

The knowledge and experience of teachers are potentially good starting point for the development of quality teaching organization. However, it seems that after a while, teachers are “cocooning” into their existing knowledge, without incentive



to further improve and apply more modern methods. Also, a very small number of seminars for the classroom that deal with the problem of contemporary/creative methodical approach to teaching literature in the younger grades of primary school is accredited, only four (The Catalogue of programs of continuous professional training of teachers, educators and professional associates, 2012). Therefore, if there is a desire of teachers to improve in this area, the number of potential opportunities has been reduced, not to mention a number of other factors (lack of motivation, resistance from management in schools, lack of money for training and others).

The factor analysis also addressed the issue concerning the assessment of ability, motivation and success for affirming, nurturing and developing socially desirable values. One factor has been singled out. Namely, all estimates are grouped into one group, which based on the structure matrix we named the *ability to affirm values* (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Value Affirmation Factors Extracted by Teachers

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	1.854	61.798	61.798	1.854	61.798	61.798	1.854	61.798	61.798

“The ability of value affirmation” factor, extracted by factor analysis, meets 61.8% of variance with very high level of components of factors being loaded from 0.764 to 0.807 (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Summary Structure Matrix

<b>Variable Components</b>	<b>Ability to affirm values</b>
<b>Capacity to affirm the socially desirable values of students.</b>	.807
<b>Success in nurturing and developing socially desirable values of students.</b>	.787
<b>Motivation for nurturing and developing socially desirable values of students.</b>	.764

Based on the results of the teachers surveyed on our sample, it is clear that teachers value the affirmation of socially desirable values very highly through the texts of literature for children being processed within Serbian language classes from the first to the fourth grade of elementary school. This means that if we affirm socially desirable values by teaching literature and if the same valid methodical actions of teachers are internalised into the personality of the pupils, then there is



a high probability that these values will become an integral part of the repertoire of students' behaviour. Affirmation of values is an important factor in the actions of teaching and teachers in building the personality of students and in the field of socially desirable behaviour.

The factor analysis also processed issues related to readers' interest. One factor has been singled out. Namely, all estimates are grouped into one group, which we named, based on the matrix of the structure, *Reading interests* (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Pupils' readership factor singled out, according to teachers' views

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	1.439	47.953	47.953	1.439	47.953	47.953	1.439	47.953	47.953

As you can see from the statistical processing of data related to this factor, it satisfies about half of the variance, or 47.9%. Therefore, nearly half of the teachers surveyed believe that reading interests are an important factor in children's contribution to the development of socially desirable behaviour for students. This, to some extent, confirms our position that if students do not read the books then it makes no sense to talk about its effect on development at all, and of course, on the development of socially desirable behaviour.

**Table 10.** Summary Structure Matrix

Variable Components	Readers' interests
Do your students like to read the required reading?	.772
How many texts (books) do your students read on average?	.747
How satisfied are you with the selection of texts of required reading provided by the school program?	.533

The components of this variable being loaded are 0.533 to 0.772 (Table 10). Slightly less is being loaded the component related to the selection of texts of the required reading foreseen by the curriculum, which we pointed out in previous chapters that teachers have certain reservations about the selection of the content of literature prescribed by the school program, that are processed in Serbian language classes from the first to the fourth grade. Our research suggests that the contents of the book that are read and analyzed in the younger classes should be critically reviewed, refreshed with new titles, organized differently, etc.

In the end, also by factor analysis, an issue related to educational means that encourages the socially desirable behaviour of students was analyzed. Two factors have been extracted. Namely, all estimates are grouped into two groups, which based on the matrix of the structure we named: 1. Educational means (praise and rewards) and 2. Educational means (attempts and penalties) (Table 11).

**Table 11.** Extracted Frequency Factors for the Use of Different Educational Assets

Components	Distinctive values			Extracted distinctive values			Distinctive values of rotated component		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	2.161	19.642	19.642	2.161	19.642	19.642	1.955	17.771	17.771
2.	1.439	13.081	32.723	1.439	13.081	32.723	1.645	14.952	32.723

The first segregated factor "educational means (praise and rewards)" meets 19.6% of variance, with the component being jaded from 0.319 to 0.740, and the other factor "educational means (attempts and penalties) meet 32.7% variance with component being jaded from 0.333 to 0.708 (Table 12).

**Table 12.** Summary Structure Matrix

<b>Variable Components</b>	<b>Praise and rewards</b>	<b>Attempts and penalties</b>
<b>Approval, word-boosting</b>	.740	
<b>Instructions, tips, warnings</b>	.659	
<b>Repeating and exercising</b>	.584	
<b>Control of work and behaviour</b>	.457	
<b>Examples from everyday life</b>	.361	
<b>Rewards and praise, sentences from texts, personal examples</b>	.319	
<b>Remarks, objections, complaints</b>		.708
<b>Punishments</b>		.655
Examples from history		.542
Overtaking and fulfilling obligations	.328	.371
Examples from literature		.333

Several important characteristics are noticeable within the statistic data which are processed in this way. First, educational means (praises and rewards) belong to a group of positive, stimulating educational means, however, their

participation is very low, according to the attitudes of the teachers surveyed. The participation of negative, repressive educational means (reproaches and penalties) is significantly higher, almost double. Second, the “examples from literature” component is extracted from another factor of this variable, which is very strange. Our assumption was that examples from literature effectively affect students and their socially desirable behaviour. As you can see from Table 12. this component has the least participation, according to the attitudes of the surveyed teachers of our research. Results like this open up certain dilemmas. Are teachers aware of the possibilities of educational action by examples from literature teaching, but they are not using them sufficiently? Or did they leave and reject one huge and underused resource? Also, do teachers consider the means of coercion and punishment-repression more than positive educational means (praise and reward)? Does this mean that even at the younger school age there are serious problems in the behaviour of pupils that positive educational means do not influence, and repression measures must be applied? Or is it easier for teachers to punish than to encourage and reward? These questions confirm the justification for working on this problem and promoting a wide field of educational action in teaching and through teaching. Answers to these and other questions may be provided by new research into this complex problem.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the presented results of this research on the educational effects of teaching literature on the development of socially desirable behaviour of students and adoption of social values, we have reached conclusions that it can be a good starting point for new research and improvement of pedagogical practice. Teachers emphasise the importance of children's literature for developing socially desirable values for students. However, it was ascertained that they attach greater importance to the prosocial values, as possible effects of teaching literature, than to the prosocial behaviour of students. In relation to the application of different teaching methods in working with students, it is evident that in the teaching of literature, the surveyed teachers mainly use the demonstrative, textual, dialogue and monologues method. However, in teaching activities they use significantly less combined methods and methods that encourage logical thinking and conclusion, and which are more suitable to the demands of modern teaching.

Adequate educational effect on students implies complementary literary value of the text itself with diverse and adequate methodical approaches in the work of teachers. Modern teaching systems imply the active position of students in teaching, offer them the possibility of their own thinking and conclusion, which determines the process of developing their overall potential, adoption of social and other values and socially desirable behaviour and action.

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