

# THEORY OF UPBRINGING AND THE APPLICATION OF PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH BILINGUAL PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH INTEGRATED PERFORMATIVE-PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

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**Abstract:** The integration of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the primary school environment requires pedagogical approaches that move beyond conventional instructional and upbringing models. The framework developed in this study combines performative pedagogical methodologies with value oriented education to support simultaneous language acquisition, social inclusion and moral development. It comprises three interconnected phases, namely collaborative creation of original narratives with explicitly formulated moral messages, enactment of these narratives through puppet theatre within a safe creative environment, and a moderated discussion aimed at eliciting and reflecting on value based principles derived from the shared experience. The study was conducted with balanced experimental and control groups, each comprising bilingual and monolingual students in grades three and four. Initial observations indicated low levels of oral participation and limited cross cultural interaction. Following the application of the framework, the experimental group displayed greater verbal engagement, a readiness to assume creative roles and increased mutual support, accompanied by deeper engagement with values oriented reflection. The study was carried out in the children's section of a public library which functioned as a non-formal educational environment, and the results reported here refer to this library based context. These findings confirm the potential of performative pedagogical practices to sustain a balance between language learning and educational upbringing while fostering intercultural sensitivity and collaborative community building.

**Keywords:** *Theory of Upbringing, Pedagogical Principles, Bilingual Education, Performative Pedagogy, Integrated Teaching Strategies, Social Inclusion in Education, Value-Oriented Learning*

Field: Pedagogy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Bulgarian primary education has faced new challenges arising from the cultural and linguistic diversity of its students. The presence of bilingual students in the classroom requires teachers to reconsider traditional methods and to integrate pedagogical approaches that combine language instruction with purposeful educational influence. In this context, the concept of performative-pedagogical practices acquires particular significance as a means of fostering sustainable communication and social connectedness among students with different backgrounds. Performative interaction, realised through puppet theatre, dramatisation, and creative story construction, offers a unique opportunity to build a trust-based environment in which students can express thoughts and emotions without fear of criticism. This form of work integrates the element of play with both instructional and educational functions, activating not only cognitive but also emotional and value-based resources of the individual. The introduction of moral reflection after each performative activity transforms the shared experience into a source of meaningful values and behavioural models. The present study proposes an authorial framework comprising three interconnected phases: collective plot development, performative enactment, and moderated values-based discussion. The framework has been designed for the primary school age group and implemented both in the school setting and in the children's section of a library, where the environment enables more informal and creative interaction. The main objective is to create a methodological structure that supports bilingual students in actively acquiring the Bulgarian language, while simultaneously fostering empathy, cooperation skills, and moral sensitivity in all participants. This study seeks to demonstrate that integrating performative-pedagogical practices into the educational process constitutes a necessary step towards the creation of an inclusive school environment in which every student has the opportunity to participate actively, be heard, and be respected.

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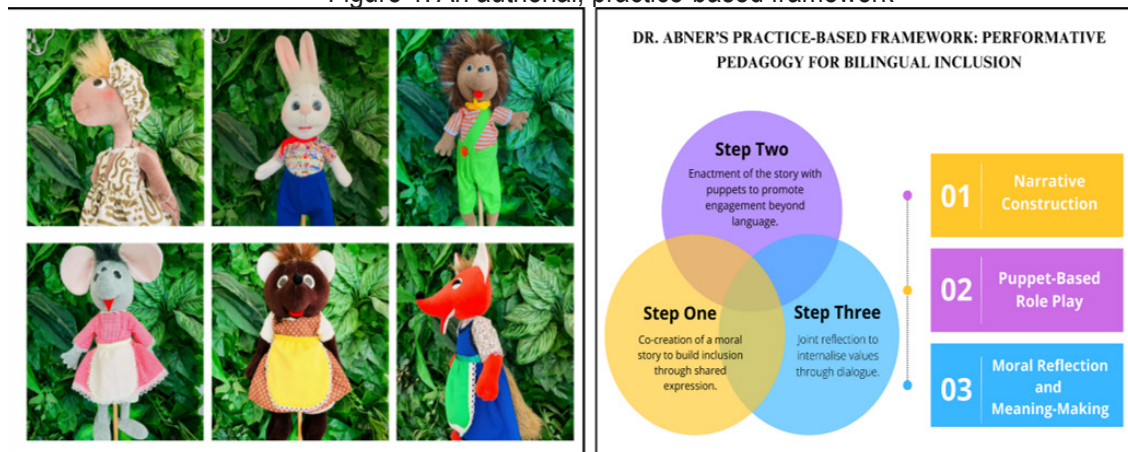
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## 2. METHODS

Pedagogical work with bilingual students in the early years of primary education requires the careful integration of educational principles that simultaneously provide linguistic support and foster cultural inclusion. Contemporary theory of upbringing conceptualizes the educational process as a dialogical exchange taking place within an authentic social environment (Biesta, 2021). This need becomes most apparent when working with students for whom school represents the first setting of systematic engagement with a foreign language and a different cultural order, a space in which they encounter significant communicative challenges. Integrated performative-pedagogical practices, based on puppet theatre and the collective creation of stories, establish a unique non-formal environment in which students interact on equal terms. Within this environment, the focus is not on linguistic deficits but on the opportunities for creative expression, the sharing of cultural narratives, and the development of intrinsic motivation for learning (Cummins, 2021). The performative experience activates both the cognitive and affective dimensions of upbringing, enabling the cultivation of empathy among students from different ethnic backgrounds. Dr. Abner's framework, developed as a result of experimental work with students from different schools, is based on three interrelated pedagogical phases: story, role, and moral lesson. The first phase involves the collaborative creation of a story by the students, drawing on culturally recognizable archetypes. The second introduces role-play through puppet theatre, in which bilingual students and their Bulgarian peers allocate roles and practise dialogue in two languages. The third phase focuses on formulating a moral lesson, whereby participants internalise the educational idea by interpreting it through their own lived experience. In this way, the framework functions both as a tool for language learning and as an instrument for moral influence and value-based socialisation. The approach aligns with the principles of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, yet is reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary understandings of play-based pedagogy (Wood, 2022). Play does not serve as a "distraction from learning" but rather constitutes the very core of the educational experience, within which a sense of belonging is nurtured. In a non-formal setting, removed from the hierarchical structure of the classroom, students participate not out of obligation but out of inspiration – a key factor in fostering intrinsic motivation and building trust (Robinson, 2016). From a pedagogical perspective, the application of educational principles such as respect, cultural appropriateness, empathy, and mutual assistance within the framework of performative activities exerts a significant formative influence on the entire group. Bulgarian students, placed in the role of hosts, learn how to welcome, support, and include peers from other cultures and nationalities. This process develops their social intelligence, cultivates ethical leadership, and fosters a sense of responsibility. At the same time, bilingual students engage in role-based interactions in which the new language is acquired as a living expression of experiences, emotions, and ideas (Mateus, 2014). Of particular significance is the use of books available in both Bulgarian and English, which facilitates linguistic comprehension and creates a bilingual cultural platform. This aligns with the ideas of Jerome Bruner, who argued that storytelling plays a pivotal role in education, as it enables the child to organise experiences, understand the actions of others, and make sense of their own place in the world (Bruner, 1997). Dr. Abner's authorial framework has been successfully implemented both within the school environment in the form of integrated pedagogical activities and in non-formal educational spaces such as libraries, summer learning programmes and cultural initiatives. At its core lies the concept of inclusion through the collaborative creation of stories, role play and moral reflection, which fosters sensitivity towards others, the development of sustainable social skills and cultural orientation among students in the early years of primary education.

Figure 1. An authorial, practice-based framework



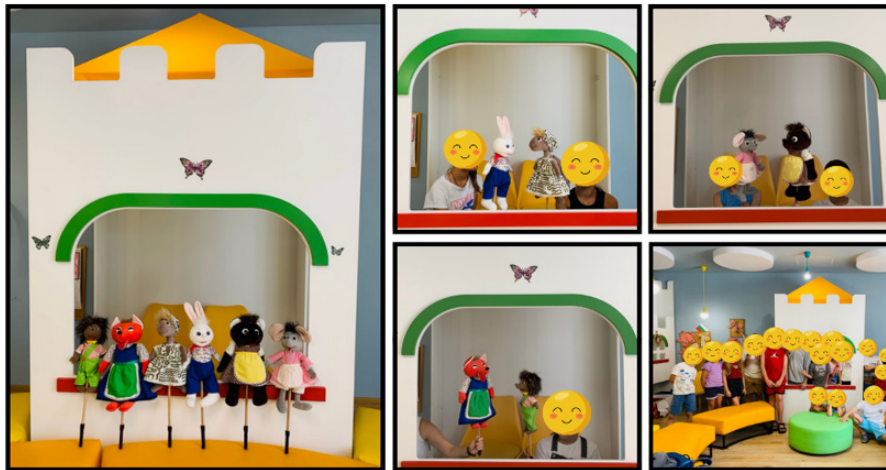
Source: Framework designed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved.

**Step One: Story Creation** - The framework aims to establish the foundation for inclusion through collaborative creativity. In mixed groups, Bulgarian students and bilingual students work together to create an original story containing a moral lesson, inspired by themes related to friendship, mutual assistance and understanding between people of different backgrounds. The process takes place in a non-formal setting such as a library, where an atmosphere of trust, equality and freedom of expression is fostered. The teacher supports the groups through the use of linguistic scaffolds, visual stimuli and pre-selected themes. Each student contributes their own ideas, while bilingual students receive additional support through bilingual vocabulary cards, translation and clarification from their peers. The objective is to create an educational experience in which a sense of belonging is developed. By the end of Step One, each group has produced a short story text that reflects the collective voice of its members and will serve as the script for Step Two.

**Step Two: Puppet Role Play** - This stage represents the performative realisation of the collaboratively created story through role play with puppets. Its primary aim is to activate a mechanism of inclusion through participation, in which language practice takes place within a safe, play-based environment. Each student selects a role corresponding to a character from the story and performs that character's lines before the group. Bilingual students are given the opportunity to contribute in Bulgarian, in their mother tongue, or in translation, with the emphasis placed not on linguistic accuracy but on active participation. The puppet theatre serves as a pedagogical stage in which language barriers are overcome through image and movement, and social roles are enacted with humour, empathy and mutual support. The teacher guides the process without dominating it, providing assistance when translation, clarification or emotional regulation is required. In this way, the step fulfils an educational function: it creates conditions for mutual understanding, builds trust and develops cooperation skills among students from different cultural backgrounds.

**Step Three: Moral Lesson and Reflection** - The purpose of this step is to transform the content of the play-based activity into a consciously recognised educational value. Following the performative presentation, students engage in a guided pedagogical discussion in which they collaboratively formulate the moral lesson of the story they have created. In this process, bilingual students are encouraged to share their perspectives, being positioned as equal participants in the moral interpretation. The teacher employs facilitation techniques by posing open-ended questions, prompting reflection on the actions of the characters and encouraging connections with the participants' own life experiences. The objective is to achieve the internalisation of the core values – empathy, tolerance and solidarity – through the students' own verbal formulations rather than by providing an externally imposed definition. The step concludes with a brief group summary, which may be recorded or illustrated as a final thought. In this way, the framework extends beyond the scope of language learning and is affirmed as a form of moral education through lived experience.

Figure 2. Operational Process

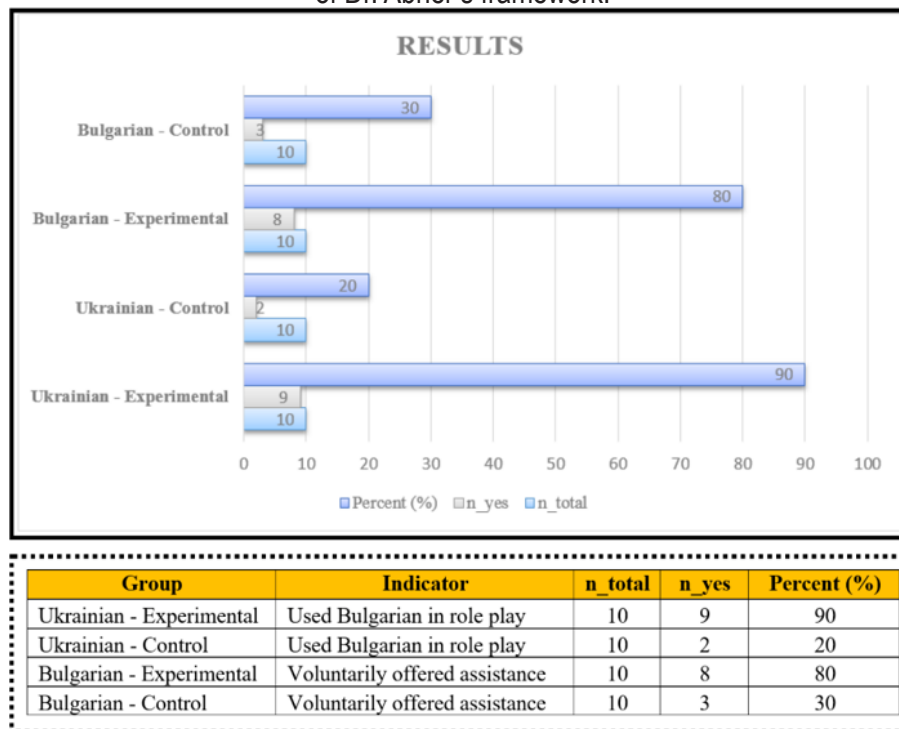


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### 3. RESULTS

The study was conducted over three consecutive weeks in a non-formal educational setting in the children's section of a Regional Library. A total of forty (40) students in grades three and four participated, equally divided into an experimental group with twenty (20) students and a control group with twenty (20) students. Each group comprised ten (10) Ukrainian bilingual students and ten (10) Bulgarian monolingual students, ensuring identical ethno-cultural distribution. The control group took part in standard extracurricular activities without the application of Dr. Abner's framework. The experimental group completed all three steps of the framework: story creation, puppet role play, and moral reflection. Baseline diagnostics showed that among Ukrainian students across both groups, sixteen (16) of twenty (20) avoided speaking Bulgarian, which corresponds to 80%, and twelve (12) of twenty (20) experienced difficulties in understanding basic instructions, which corresponds to 60%. Following implementation of the framework in the experimental group, the language activity of Ukrainian students increased: nine (9) of ten (10) used Bulgarian during role play (90%), and seven (7) of ten (10) participated in the moral discussion using full sentences in Bulgarian (70%). In the control group, the post-test observations remained at baseline levels, with eight (8) of ten (10) avoiding Bulgarian and six (6) of ten (10) showing difficulties with instructions. Only two (2) of ten (10) Ukrainian students in the control group used Bulgarian during role play (20%), and three (3) of ten (10) participated in the moral discussion using full sentences in Bulgarian (30%). Percentages are calculated on the relevant subgroup denominators. At baseline, voluntary assistance among Bulgarian students was observed in four (4) of ten (10) in the experimental group (40%) and three (3) of ten (10) in the control group (30%). Following the implementation of the framework, Bulgarian students in the experimental group demonstrated greater empathy and readiness for cooperation. Eight (8) of ten (10) voluntarily offered assistance with translation or with the formulation of responses (80%), compared with three (3) of ten (10) in the control group (30%). These findings indicate that the framework exerts a meaningful educational and linguistic effect on bilingual students while also developing intercultural sensitivity among their Bulgarian peers within a non-formal environment supported by play-based pedagogical tools.

Figure 3. Comparative results for control and experimental groups before and after the application of Dr. Abner's framework.



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#### 4. DISCUSSION

Following the application of the framework, a comprehensive educational effect is achieved at three levels, namely linguistic inclusion, moral awareness and social connectedness among students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In linguistic terms, bilingual students begin to use Bulgarian not only as an academic object of study but as a living medium for communication, collaboration and meaningful participation. They move from passive comprehension to active speaking without coercion through play based and emotionally engaging situations. Language is acquired through lived experience rather than through formal grammar instruction (Fisher, D., Frey, N., Gonzalez, V, 2025). As Teodora Valeva notes, reading culture must be cultivated from the earliest childhood and its formation requires sustained effort and consistency on the part of both the family and the teachers of young students (Valeva, 2023). Building on this line of argument, Gergana Avramova shows that the early cultivation of emotional awareness is foundational for social and ethical self-regulation and she highlights the need for valid instruments that trace the dynamics of socioemotional development in school contexts. The reflection phase of the present framework answers this requirement by transforming the shared performance into structured dialogue that names feelings with precision, invites reasoned justification of choices and consolidates prosocial norms within the peer group (Avramova, 2017). Consistent with this argument, Viktoriya Hristova maintains that education for sustainable development in the early grades should be organised as reflective learning that integrates ecological, social and economic knowledge in real contexts and fosters anticipatory responsibility. The reflection phase of the present framework addresses this by guiding pupils to link feelings and reasons to likely outcomes and to rehearse responsible action (Hristova, 2024). From a moral educational perspective, each group develops its own value framework, expressed through the moral of the collaboratively created story. In the interplay of creation, enactment and reflection, students form an internalised understanding of concepts such as goodness, justice and respect for others, not as externally imposed definitions but as lived experiences. At this point the framework overcomes pedagogy as mere technique and is affirmed as education through lived experience. The framework developed by Dr. Abner achieves educational transformation. Bilingual students feel accepted, equal and significant. They cease to be the children who do not understand and become storytellers, participants and authors of new narratives. Bulgarian students, rather than remaining passive observers of difference, become active bearers of empathy and cultural mediation. Moreover, the integration of performative pedagogical practices within bilingual education resonates with contemporary research that advocates

experiential, identity affirming approaches which facilitate both linguistic competence and critical cultural engagement. Sergio Sanchez emphasises that drama pedagogy with multilingual learners supports language development by enabling embodied and collaborative learning (Sanchez, 2022). Similarly, in foreign language teaching, a number of scholars including Shujie Luo have shown through empirical evidence that process drama enhances speaking and communicative motivation, which aligns with the model's aim to situate language learning as a dynamic and participatory experience (Luo, 2024); (Hu, Y., Shu, J, 2025); (Arias, 2025). These complementary findings strengthen the theoretical foundations of Dr. Abner's framework and affirm its coherence with the Theory of Upbringing. By embedding moral reflection within shared performative narrative creation, the model addresses bilingual language acquisition while at the same time nurturing the learner's ethical, social and cultural dimensions, fully consistent with the pedagogical principles stated in the study's title.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The framework developed by Dr. Avi Abner represents an original and empirically validated pedagogical innovation, designed for multilingual and monolingual primary school contexts in Bulgaria. It consists of three integrated steps: collaborative story creation, performative enactment through puppet theatre, and values-based reflection. The study has demonstrated that this structure is effective in promoting linguistic inclusion, social cooperation and moral awareness. The results indicate that bilingual students improve their active use of the Bulgarian language, while monolingual peers develop intercultural empathy, collaborative skills and ethical orientation. Although existing scholarship highlights the potential of drama-based learning to enhance language acquisition and community building the specific sequencing, methodology and cultural contextualisation of Dr. Abner's framework are unique and constitute a new contribution to the field (Winston, J., Stinson, M, 2013); (Aliano, K., Chang, D , 2024). By transforming the learning process into a shared cultural and moral experience, the framework conceptualises language learning as a lived practice and value formation as an outcome of authentic interaction. This approach aligns with inclusive pedagogical principles described in recent literature while extending them through a context-specific, empirically tested design. The use of accessible spaces such as libraries or flexible classroom areas ensures scalability without the need for significant resources (Cummins, 2021); (Dahl-Tallgren, 2023). Given its adaptability to diverse thematic domains and its proven ability to overcome barriers typical of formal instruction, the framework has the potential to become a sustainable practice within Bulgarian primary education. Its implementation supports linguistic adaptation while also fostering a culture of respect, trust and inclusion that underpins meaningful participation in both educational and wider social contexts.

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