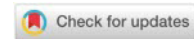


# THE DIALOGUE AS A METHOD IN THE THEORY OF UPBRINGING: AN AUTHORIAL PSYCHODRAMATIC MODEL FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT OF PEDAGOGY STUDENTS THROUGH SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION OF FEARS

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a pedagogical model that integrates the principles of psychodrama and expressive arts therapy within the classical framework of the pedagogical dialogue. The study investigates the potential of symbolic transformation as a pedagogical mechanism for reducing anxiety and enhancing emotional resilience among pedagogy students. Developed by Dr. Avi Abner and grounded in the theory of upbringing, the model unites cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning through creative expression and reflective interaction. It introduces a holistic process in which dialogue becomes a transformative medium for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and personal growth. The research was conducted at Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov" with students of pedagogy and social pedagogy in part-time study programmes, who participated in a structured pedagogical experiment. The findings demonstrated a clear reduction in students' anxiety levels and an increase in emotional stability and self-reflective competence. These results validate the pedagogical significance of dialogical and creative approaches in shaping future educators who can maintain psychological balance and empathy in professional contexts. The proposed model contributes to contemporary pedagogical theory by bridging the artistic, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of education. It redefines the pedagogical dialogue as both a diagnostic and transformative tool, enabling future teachers to internalize mechanisms of self-regulation and emotional resilience. The study affirms that the integration of psychodramatic and art-therapeutic principles into teacher education represents a valuable innovation in developing reflective, emotionally mature, and socially responsive professionals.

**Keywords:** *Theory of upbringing; expressive arts therapy; symbolic transformation; teacher education; socio-pedagogical support; catharsis; self-regulation; reflective practice; holistic education.*

**Field:** Pedagogy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of emotional resilience and self-regulatory competence has become an essential dimension of teacher education in the twenty-first century. As Christopher Day, Qing Gu argue, teachers' professional effectiveness is inseparable from their emotional and moral well-being, which must be developed through reflective and supportive pedagogical frameworks (Day, C., Gu, Q, 2010). Contemporary pedagogy no longer perceives the educational process solely as cognitive transmission, but rather as an integrative field encompassing intellectual, affective, and social development (Hargreaves, 1998), (Noddings, 1986). Within this expanded paradigm, the pedagogical dialogue- traditionally used as a means of moral and intellectual formation acquires renewed significance when coupled with creative and therapeutic practices that activate both the emotional and symbolic dimensions of learning. Teacher preparation, therefore, must address the psychological dimension of learning-to-teach, fostering the ability to recognize, manage, and transform emotional experiences constructively (Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T, 2009). Emotional self-regulation is no longer peripheral but rather a prerequisite for authentic pedagogical relationships built on empathy, trust, and care (Noddings, 1986). Within this humanistic framework, dialogue assumes a pivotal role, functioning not merely as a didactic technique but as a means of mutual discovery and meaning-making between teacher and learner (Freire, 2000). This understanding corresponds to the view of Mihaela Shanova, who traces the dialogue as a fundamental pedagogical method from Antiquity to the present day and demonstrates its enduring relevance as a form of meaningful and value oriented communication in education (Shanova, 2012). Theoretical and empirical contributions in expressive arts and psychodrama further expand this understanding by demonstrating that symbolic and creative processes can facilitate psychological transformation and emotional integration (Malchiodi, 2020). By engaging in expressive action, individuals externalize inner conflicts, convert them

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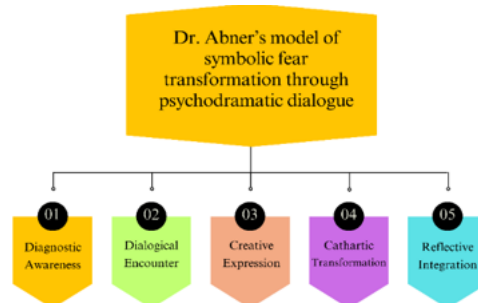


into symbolic representations, and achieve insight through reflective dialogue. In the context of teacher education, such processes nurture self-awareness, empathy, and resilience, which are indispensable for sustainable professional growth and classroom stability. The current study emerges within this intellectual and pedagogical landscape, proposing an integrative approach that aligns classical methods of the theory of upbringing with contemporary psychodramatic and art-therapeutic perspectives. It positions creative and dialogical experience as the foundation for developing emotionally balanced and socially responsive educators capable of navigating the complexities of twenty-first-century teaching practice.

## 2. METHODS

Contemporary tendencies in pedagogical theory and practice emphasize the necessity of integrating methods that unite the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of the student's personality. Of particular importance are those pedagogical approaches that allow experience to function as a process of creative and symbolic transformation. In this context, the dialogue, as a method in the theory of upbringing, may be enriched through the integration of psychodramatic and art-therapeutic techniques, with the purpose of achieving deeper personal and social support. Existing empirical studies in the field of expressive art therapies indicate that their transformative effect is realized through specific mechanisms of change such as embodiment, materialization, and symbolic work (De Witte, M., Orkibi, H., et al, 2021), (Grant, 2023). These mechanisms become particularly evident within the context of psychodrama, where action and symbol intertwine in an experiential process capable of transforming internal conflicts. In the pedagogical preparation of future teachers, such an approach has the potential to reduce anxiety, enhance emotional resilience, and foster the development of social competences necessary for effective group work. Recent meta-analyses confirm that creative arts-based practices of this kind are effective in reducing stress and anxiety among young people, while simultaneously strengthening their capacity for self-reflection and social integration (Frasco, E., Sherr, L., et al, 2025). This understanding is consistent with recent integrative perspectives in creative arts therapies, which demonstrate that structured creative modalities can be safely combined with trauma-informed approaches such as EMDR in order to support emotional regulation and the processing of complex experiences (Davis, 2022). This perspective is further reinforced by contemporary art therapy models that explain trauma repair through the interaction of expressive processes, somatic regulation, and narrative integration (Knash, 2024). This is particularly significant for pedagogy students, who, throughout their academic training, often encounter considerable emotional and academic stress. In this sense, the combination of the didactic conversation with art-therapeutic techniques and psychodramatic catharsis establishes the essential connection between diagnosis, experience, and transformation. The proposed authorial model is structured around several consecutive stages. First, through a diagnostic questionnaire, students' fears are identified and symbolically represented through the image of an animal. This initial phase corresponds to the principle of materialization, which, according to Peter Kellermann, is fundamental for creating a necessary distance between the individual and the traumatic content, allowing the experience to be observed, expressed, and ultimately transformed within a safe symbolic framework (Kellermann, 1992). The second stage involves a dialogical conversation within the group, during which sharing and reflection on the chosen symbols are encouraged. The third stage consists of creative expression through glass painting. The transparency and fragility of glass function as a metaphor for psychological vulnerability, while the artistic process activates the therapeutic mechanisms of symbolism and embodiment (Malchiodi, 2020). The fourth stage is a cathartic act of breaking the glass, through which fear is symbolically destroyed. The final, fifth stage consists of group reflection, during which students integrate their experiences and comprehend their own process of transformation.

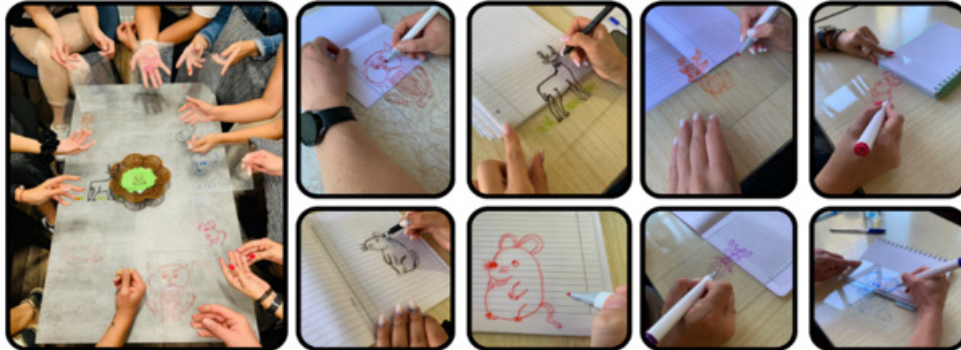
**Figure 1.** Conceptual model



**Source:** The model developed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved

The necessity of applying this method in pedagogical education arises from the fact that future teachers must develop resilience to stress, as well as the ability to work with their own fears and emotions. If these competences are not formed during the university years, there is a risk that their insecurity will be transferred into their professional practice. It is precisely here that the psychodramatic model, grounded in dialogue and symbolic experience, emerges as an effective instrument for psychological and socio-pedagogical support.

Fig. 2 Working process

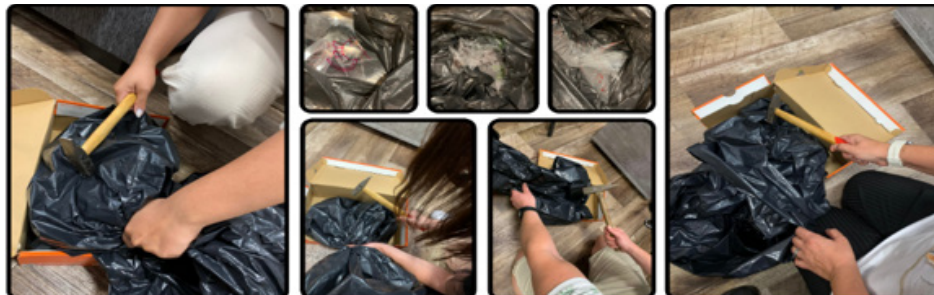


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### 3. DISCUSSIONS

On a theoretical level, this authorial model integrates the fundamental principles of psychodrama—spontaneity, creativity, emotional awareness, and catharsis—within the classical structure of the pedagogical dialogue (López-González, M. A., Morales-Landazábal, P., & Topa, G, 2021). This interpretation is further supported by recent survey findings showing that strong social bonds function as a protective factor against fear of exclusion and its negative psychological consequences (Gumus, 2025). It enables profound work with personal fears and the development of resilient strategies for coping and self-regulation among future educators. From the perspective of socio-pedagogical support, this model is based on the creation of a safe and supportive environment, specifically within the Office for Psychological and Socio-Pedagogical Support, which is unique in the Republic of Bulgaria and located at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov,” Faculty of Social Sciences. It is precisely in the Office for Psycho-Social Support that students share similar experiences and assist one another in achieving mutual emotional stabilization. The symbolic action contributes to the development of interpersonal empathy and solidarity, both essential for successful pedagogical practice and for constructive interpersonal interaction within the professional environment. The authorial psychodramatic model, integrating the dialogue as a method in the theory of upbringing, developed by Dr. Avi Abner, provides psychological support and opportunities for socio-pedagogical development, preparing pedagogy students for successful professional realization. A particularly significant moment in the authorial model is the fourth stage, in which the symbolic destruction of fears is achieved through the breaking of glass. Here the classical psychodramatic concept of catharsis is realized, introduced by Jacob Levy Moreno as a fundamental therapeutic mechanism for the transformation of inner tension (Moreno, 2010). In the specific pedagogical context, this act combines both emotional release and a socio-pedagogical function (Orkibi, 2025); (Giacomucci, 2025). Through it, students confront their own vulnerability, symbolized by the transparency and fragility of glass, and are given the opportunity to break the internal barriers that hinder their professional and personal development. International studies on the therapeutic mechanisms of psychodrama confirm that symbolic action plays a crucial role in achieving inner transformation and lasting change in personal attitudes (López-González, M. A., Morales-Landazábal, P., & Topa, G, 2021); (Gaztambide, 2024). The breaking of glass, as the culmination of the process, acts as a catalyst for the experience, allowing students to move from a state of anxiety to one of release and confidence. This experience possesses a therapeutic value comparable to that described by Cathy Malchiodi in her studies on expressive arts and their role in coping with traumatic experiences (Malchiodi, 2020). The figure below visualizes precisely this cathartic moment, realized within the specialized Office for Psycho-Social Support for pedagogy students.

**Figure 3.** Cathartic transformation process



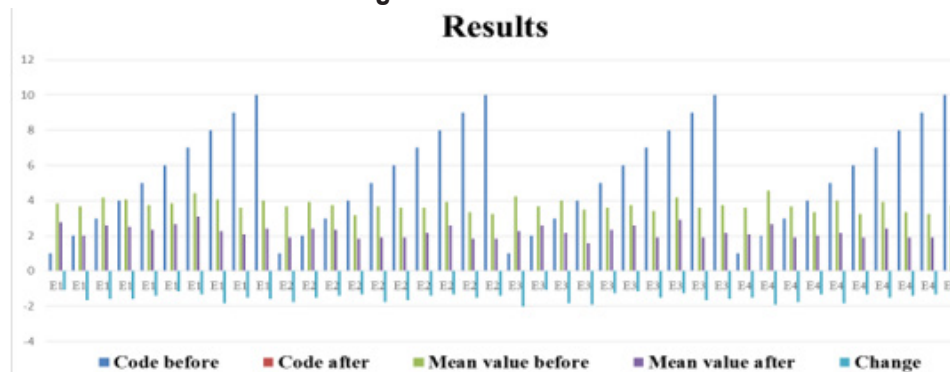
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After the cathartic phase, students proceed to the final stage of group reflection, during which the experience is comprehended and integrated into their professional identity. In this way, a sustainable foundation is created for their future pedagogical practice. If this stage is omitted, there is a risk that unconscious fears may be transferred into the school environment, hindering the formation of a genuine connection between teacher and student. Therefore, the method based on the combination of dialogue, psychodramatic catharsis, and group reflection holds particular significance for the preparation of future educators.

#### 4. RESULTS

The study involved a total of 80 participants, divided into an experimental group ( $n = 40$ ) and a control group ( $n = 40$ ). The results demonstrate a clear difference between the two groups. As illustrated in Figure 4, students from the experimental group, organised into four subgroups (E1–E4), who participated in the dialogic-psychodramatic sessions showed a marked reduction in anxiety levels, with mean scores decreasing from 3.83 before the programme to 2.16 after its completion. This reduction was consistent across all experimental subgroups, with mean change values ranging from  $-1.48$  to  $-1.52$ , indicating a stable and uniform effect of the applied pedagogical model. In contrast, the control group exhibited only minimal variation between measurements. Group-level analysis further confirmed a statistically significant reduction in anxiety in the experimental group, accompanied by a large effect size ( $d = -6.42$ ), whereas the control group showed only a small change ( $d = -0.47$ ), despite reaching statistical significance ( $p = .005$ ).

**Figure 4.** Observed outcomes



**Source:** Designed and developed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The present study validates an authorial pedagogical technology that extends the classical didactic conversation by integrating symbolic expression and psychodramatic catharsis. In doing so, it establishes a sustainable framework for psychological and socio-pedagogical support for pedagogy students. The application of the model resulted in a distinct and statistically significant reduction in self-reported anxiety within the experimental group, confirming its effectiveness both theoretically and practically. The reliability of the instrument used remained high across both measurements, ensuring the validity and

credibility of the results. The observed effects correspond to Moreno's classical concepts of catharsis and to subsequent research in the field of expressive arts therapies which emphasize the importance of spontaneity, symbolic action, and group reflection as essential pathways for emotional transformation and internal regulation (Malchiodi, 2020), (De Witte, M., Orkibi, H., et al, 2021). In this sense, Dr. Avi Abner's model demonstrates high applicability in the preparation of future teachers, as it addresses the risk of transferring personal fears and insecurities into school practice through experiential yet methodically structured symbolic work and collective reflection. From a pedagogical standpoint, the model offers clear implications for university-level teacher education. It can be integrated into the academic disciplines Theory of upbringing and pedagogical diagnostics as a structured learning session conducted in two phases pre-assessment and post-assessment of anxiety. The session should include clearly defined safety guidelines, a guided group dialogue, creative expression, and a final reflective phase. Ultimately, the model demonstrates that the integration of dialogue, symbolic expression, and catharsis within a structured educational framework represents an effective tool for reducing anxiety and enhancing the professional readiness of future teachers. It not only alleviates momentary emotional tension but also fosters the development of sustainable competences for self-reflection, emotional maturity, and social interaction-key prerequisites for high-quality pedagogical practice. The theoretical coherence of the model with established psychodramatic and art-therapeutic frameworks, supported by empirical data, positions it as a promising innovation in university education in the fields of Theory of upbringing and social pedagogy, as well as a meaningful contribution to the contemporary paradigm of holistic education.

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