HEROES AS PEDAGOGICAL MODELS IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION

APOSTOLOS KARAOULAS

Laboratory Teaching Staff, University of Ioannina, School of Education Sciences,
Department of Early Childhood Education

ABSTRACT

The study of heroes as pedagogical models in European education focuses on the significance of heroic narratives in cultivating moral and social values, as well as their role in shaping the consciousness of younger generations. Heroes, from antiquity to the modern era, serve as models for emulation, offering examples of bravery, justice, and social responsibility. In European education, heroic narratives are closely linked to the development of social consciousness and the formation of a critical and responsible stance toward social and ethical challenges.

From classical figures, such as the heroes of Greek mythology and medieval characters, to contemporary narratives in children's literature, the heroic tradition has consistently influenced educational approaches across Europe. Heroic figures not only provide moral development models but also promote a sense of community, cooperation, and responsibility, embedding fundamental values that contribute to the strong social integration of young individuals.

The pedagogical value of these heroes extends beyond the mere narration of their achievements; it also enhances social skills and critical thinking, fostering self-awareness and ethical growth. Modern education continues to draw upon the heroic tradition, utilizing heroic models to promote solidarity, justice, and collectivity, thereby ensuring the stability of educational and social structures.

The methodological approach of this study is based on a qualitative analysis of heroic narratives and the pedagogical values they promote. It combines theoretical perspectives from pedagogy and sociology, while employing interpretative tools that address the historical and cultural dimensions of heroes in European education. Through a comparative study of ancient and contemporary heroic narratives, this research examines how heroic models have influenced pedagogical values and social structures, clarifying their role in shaping the moral and cultural consciousness of younger generations.

Keywords: Pedagogical models, European education, pedagogical values, moral values, heroic models

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical utilization of heroic figures in childhood education highlights the relationship between education and the cultivation of enduring moral values. Heroes, as cultural and social constructs, have historically functioned as carriers of values, traditions, and ideologies. From antiquity to the modern era, they have been integrated into educational practices as behavioral

models and sources of inspiration, offering children the opportunity to understand history, society, and themselves.

In ancient Greece, for example, mythological heroes such as Telemachus and Heracles were not only models of courage and virtue but also served as mediums for transmitting the values of the city-state (Nagy, 1998). Similarly, in Rome, the legends of Romulus and Remus contributed to shaping Roman identity and the principles of social cohesion (Forsythe, 2006). During the Middle Ages, the knights of the Round Table symbolized bravery, loyalty, and religious devotion, embodying ideals promoted through literature and art of the time (Loomis, 2000).

With the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, education assumed a central role in shaping heroic archetypes. A characteristic example is Till Eulenspiegel, who embodied resistance against oppression and the pursuit of freedom and justice (Seliger & Seliger, 2001). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the heroes of children's literature, such as Selma Lagerlöf's Nils Holgersson and Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio, emerged as figures of moral education and personal development (Lagerlöf, 1995; Collodi, 2021). Through his adventures, Nils promotes an understanding of the natural world and the importance of environmental responsibility while simultaneously emphasizing personal growth through experience and knowledge. Pinocchio, on the other hand, offers lessons on personal responsibility and truth, illustrating the significance of moral integrity, self-awareness, and the consequences, both positive and negative, of individual choices and actions. His story underscores the role of moral judgment and personal accountability in shaping individual and social life.

The contemporary era, however, presents new challenges. In a world where values are being redefined, the question arises whether past heroes can continue to inspire new generations or whether new models are required. Fictional heroes, such as Harry Potter, and real-life figures, such as Greta Thunberg, emerge as symbols of courage, resistance, and social change (Granger, 2009; Thunberg, 2019). Modern role models reflect the social and environmental concerns of the present, promoting values such as collaboration, innovation, and environmental awareness.

The purpose of this article is to explore the timeless relevance of heroes in the educational process, whether they belong exclusively to the past or continue to inspire contemporary society. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the need for a critical approach in the selection and presentation of heroic models, considering social and cultural transformations. This study is framed within the broader European context of cultural heritage and educational practice, offering a reflection on the future of education in Europe. How can heroes respond to the needs of a multicultural, dynamic, and environmentally conscious society? What is their role in cultivating active and responsible citizens? These questions will be examined throughout the article.

2.0 THE PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HEROES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The significance of heroes and mythical figures in child development is multifaceted, influencing moral and emotional growth while also contributing to the formation of social consciousness and personal identity through value systems, behavioral models, and collective memory. Heroes, whether fictional or inspired by real-life figures, serve as reference points for children, helping them recognize and understand fundamental values such as morality and

resilience, while also assisting in emotional regulation. In his work The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim (2010) highlights the crucial role of fairy tales in children's psychological development, emphasizing how stories and their heroes help children process emotions and comprehend the relationship between good and evil, courage and fear.

The pedagogical value of heroes is further reinforced through their moral dimension. As Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) analyzes, heroes in fairy tales aid children in developing their moral reasoning by presenting ethical dilemmas and choices. Moral development is linked to various stages of ethical reasoning, which are strengthened through identification with heroes and the observation of their decisions and consequences. This process establishes the necessary conditions for children to understand the concept of justice and cultivate their moral values by engaging in the adventures and internal conflicts of heroic figures.

Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence offers another dimension to the pedagogical significance of heroes. Fairy tale heroes enhance different types of intelligence, including linguistic, emotional, logical, and social intelligence. Through the adventures of heroes, children develop the ability to understand emotions and communicate more effectively with others. Additionally, the imaginative nature of fairy tales fosters creativity, allowing children to think abstractly, solve problems, and experiment with new ideas.

The psychological and pedagogical importance of heroes is also emphasized by Carol Pearson (2015), who, in her work The Hero Within, highlights the significance of archetypal heroes in shaping children's personalities. Heroes provide children with role models and ideals that help them recognize different aspects of themselves and navigate life's challenges. Identifying with a hero enhances a child's sense of personal strength, self-esteem, and emotional resilience, equipping them with the tools to cope with adversity.

The influence of heroes extends to the social domain as well, as reflected in their relationships and interactions with others. Jean Piaget (1962) explores the role of fairy tales in children's social development, arguing that heroes teach children about social values, solidarity, and cooperation. Through their adventures, children gain insight into social conflicts and the necessity of collaboration and compromise, strengthening their emotional intelligence and social skills.

The connection between heroes, imagination, and free thought fosters creativity. According to Bettelheim (2010), children's imagination is cultivated through engagement with heroic figures who embody transcendent and imaginative potential. Imagination promotes creativity and a continuous search for new perspectives, enhancing a child's ability to think abstractly and explore innovative ideas.

Through stories and heroes, children also come to understand justice and social values, developing the ability to recognize the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for them. As Kohlberg (1981) notes, heroes provide children with concrete models for understanding morality and social identity. By identifying with these figures, children expand their awareness of social values and mutual understanding.

Emotional intelligence, which develops through interactions with heroic figures, is another critical aspect of child development. Pearson (2015) underscores how heroes help children

become aware of their emotions and develop empathy. Facing internal and external struggles, heroes offer children tools to understand personal challenges and manage emotional obstacles, fostering emotional resilience and the ability to respond to difficult situations with empathy and self-control.

Finally, storytelling and fictional heroes provide children with an opportunity to experiment with different aspects of the world, allowing them to discover new possibilities and contradictions. This process helps them develop new perspectives and enhances their emotional and moral maturity, equipping them with the skills to navigate complex social and ethical landscapes.

3.0 THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL NECESSITY OF HEROES

Children's heroes convey significant values, serving as an integral part of the educational process and the formation of social models. Their pedagogical and social message has historically permeated European mythology, history, and literature, is embedded in educational materials, and fosters fundamental principles that promote coexistence, moral development, and personal growth (Campbell, 2018; Hamilton, 2011).

Solidarity, as a fundamental value in education and society, is highlighted through ancient myths. The labors of Heracles, such as the cleaning of the Augean stables and the liberation of Prometheus, symbolize not only physical strength and endurance but also the support of the vulnerable and the contribution to the common good. The cleaning of the stables required ingenuity (using the flow of rivers), demonstrating a sense of responsibility for the greater good, while the liberation of Prometheus illustrates solidarity with the suffering and self-sacrifice for the restoration of justice, values that profoundly shaped the core principles of the European Renaissance, influencing the intellectual and social evolution of the time (Hamilton, 2011). Similarly, the quest for the Golden Fleece by the Argonauts emphasizes the importance of cooperation and teamwork, as the contribution of each member determined the mission's success. The return of Odysseus to Ithaca, through his long and arduous journey, underscores the value of perseverance and faith in human relationships, while the use of the Trojan Horse highlights the significance of ingenuity and strategic thinking. Ancient heroes served as models of admiration and imitation for children, guiding their thinking and shaping their perception of moral values. Through their adventures and sacrifices, children grasp concepts such as social responsibility and the necessity of collaboration, strengthening their moral perceptions and cultivating a sense of solidarity and collectivity (Hamilton, 2011).

Narratives from the Trojan War, such as the stories of Achilles and Hector, enrich the understanding of honor, loyalty, and the consequences of war. Hector, who defends Troy despite knowing the inevitable outcome, embodies courage and selflessness. Achilles, as a demigod and warrior, seeks revenge for the death of Patroclus, emphasizing the value of friendship and bravery, as he strives to honor his fallen comrade and restore his own dignity in the Trojan War. Odysseus, with his wit and perseverance, remains a timeless model of resourcefulness and adaptability, qualities that are intensely emphasized in education. The narratives of these heroic figures provide students with a framework for studying human nature, ethics, and the societal consequences of individual actions, with a particular focus on problem-solving strategies and resilience in adversity (Lane Fox, 2008).

Similarly, during the Middle Ages, the concept of collectivity and faith prevailed through the stories of knights, which introduced new forms of heroism. The legendary tales surrounding King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table reinforce fundamental values such as justice, devotion to the common good, and the defense of the weak, placing particular emphasis on self-sacrifice and the ethical responsibilities assumed by members of this heroic fellowship. Sir Lancelot, through his bravery and unwavering commitment, became a model of moral integrity, while the stories of the Crusaders highlighted the significance of faith and freedom (Malory, 1889–1891). The narratives of King Arthur and his knights frame heroism within a mythical dimension, presenting their achievements and virtues in a way that crafts a legend of bravery, loyalty, and sacrifice.

In modern times, Don Quixote, as a literary hero, presents a complex image linked to values of resistance, self-sacrifice, and the pursuit of ideals, elements that clash with a more pragmatic and realistic worldview. During the 17th century, when Cervantes' novel was published, European societies were experiencing political and cultural uncertainty, and the need for heroes who challenged established traditions and raised existential questions was evident. Don Quixote, despite his seemingly absurd behavior, reflects values of personal honor, perseveranc, and conscientiousness, which play a crucial role in shaping young people's moral awareness. The hero's struggle against societal contradictions and the challenges of his world highlights the necessity for deeper reflection and reconsideration of reality, reinforcing moral values of perseverance, faith, and dedication in the face of adversity (Sepulveda, 2012; Gibson, 1990).

Examining the impact of Don Quixote on modern education reveals that the character continues to serve as a model of individual consistency and ideals in a world that often seems to drift away from these values. The promotion of the notion of individual purpose, even when it appears irrational or impossible, strengthens educational teachings about perseverance and faith in personal integrity. In the school setting, the story of Don Quixote integrates themes of resistance and struggle against convention, creating opportunities for discussions on individual choice and social responsibility. Through school curricula, Don Quixote becomes a stimulus for the development of critical thinking and discussions on the significance of dreams and practical action in education (Freire, 2000).

The continuous presence of Don Quixote as an educational tool, particularly through literature, demonstrates that his story resonates with contemporary challenges, encouraging sensitivity toward social issues and ethical values. His quest for justice and refusal to accept reality as it is, highlights the importance of empathy and the engaged citizen who seeks change through persistent effort. Cervantes' narrative underscores the value of solidarity while incorporating critical thinking as a means of understanding social challenges. These values, which remain relevant today, emphasize the importance of promoting ideas that encourage active participation and ethical commitment to society (Freire, 1998).

In literature, heroes reflect shifts in social and cultural thought, highlighting the importance of experience and education. In Selma Lagerlöf's The Wonderful Adventures of Nils, Nils Holgersson transitions from indifference to responsibility, demonstrating the significance of cooperation and knowledge (Lagerlöf, 1995). Similarly, Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio portrays a journey toward moral completion, where effort and change are central themes, with the act of

saving his father symbolizing the foundation of moral judgment and self-sacrifice (Collodi, 2021). In the same vein, Anne from Anne of Green Gables by Lucy Maud Montgomery exemplifies the value of independence and creativity, while her love of learning underscores the importance of education as a means of social transformation. Each of these heroes, through their unique experiences, reflects the values of their respective eras while offering timeless lessons on human growth and development (Montgomery, 2017).

The theme of friendship and social interaction is emphasized in works such as Le Petit Nicolas by René Goscinny. Nicolas' adventures with his friends highlight the value of cooperation, acceptance of diversity, and social responsibility, as evidenced by their collective efforts to navigate everyday challenges (Goscinny & Sempé, 2013). Despite their simplicity, these narratives embed profound pedagogical and social messages, making them valuable educational tools. Moreover, they illustrate the enduring importance of human relationships as the foundation of social cohesion and the creation of healthy communities.

Examining the values that children's heroes convey leads to the conclusion that their adventures encapsulate fundamental principles essential to the educational process and the formation of responsible and ethically mature citizens. Through the analysis of heroic narratives, it becomes evident that these stories serve not only as entertainment but also as instruments of education. They transmit timeless values such as solidarity, justice, self-awareness, and collective responsibility, which remain relevant and necessary across historical and social contexts.

Heroic narratives adapt to the needs and challenges of their respective eras, underscoring their timelessness and adaptability. For example, ancient myths emphasize overcoming individual and collective difficulties, highlighting the value of selfless contribution and sacrifice. During the Middle Ages, stories of knights and crusaders incorporated the concepts of duty and faith, while in more recent times, national and literary heroes emphasized the importance of freedom, independence, and social justice.

In contemporary society, where values are continually redefined, children's heroes continue to offer significant pedagogical and social messages. Through their works, authors and creators enrich stories with values such as the acceptance of diversity, environmental consciousness, and cooperation. These heroes inspire children to actively engage in society, promoting a vision of collective progress and individual responsibility.

Thus, the study of children's heroes and the values they embody is not merely a review of the past but also an invitation to reflect on the relevance of these values in shaping the present and the future. The enduring power of their messages demonstrates that heroic narratives remain a source of inspiration and instruction, shaping societies based on solidarity, justice, and human dignity.

4.0 THE ROLE OF HEROES IN VALUE FORMATION

Society's need for heroes is a timeless reality that reflects humanity's deep desire to recognize and attribute value to figures and symbols that embody ideals. Heroes function as carriers of identity, unity, and hope, offering models of behavior and values. Émile Durkheim (2001) emphasized that societies are constructed around shared symbols and values, with heroes

serving as unifying reference points that transcend individual differences and establish collective cultural identities. Heroic narratives thus assume a normative role, shaping modes of action and values that reflect societal expectations and ethical directions.

The historical evolution of the concept of the hero is closely linked to social and cultural transformations. In ancient Greece, heroes embodied the transcendence of human limits, incorporating fundamental values such as bravery, virtue, and resilience, which continue to influence how we perceive human strength and morality in contemporary societies. Joseph Campbell (2018, reprint), in The Hero With a Thousand Faces, argues that heroic narratives across cultures follow a common structure, known as the "hero's journey." This structure includes phases such as the call to adventure, the trials that challenge the hero, the crossing of a threshold, and ultimately, the return with newfound wisdom. Each stage of the journey serves as a metaphor for personal and ethical development, reflecting the shared patterns of cultural storytelling and their connection to the fundamental values of each society.

A universal model emerges, demonstrating that societies create heroes to express their hopes and fears, transmit values, and confront the challenges of their time. The concept of the hero relates to the social transmission of values, as the stories surrounding heroes shape collective meanings of courage, justice, and self-sacrifice. The study of narrative structures reveals that heroic figures often respond to the historical needs of the societies that elevate them, reflecting dominant perceptions of power, morality, and social order.

Simultaneously, the preservation and reproduction of heroic narratives are linked to educational and pedagogical processes. Heroic stories contribute to shaping collective ideals and reinforcing the socialization of younger generations by promoting values deemed essential for maintaining social cohesion. Heroes embody humanity's need to project and emulate figures that encapsulate ideals and accomplishments, making their presence crucial in constructing social identity. That heroes are not just a narrative of literature or mythology is also argued by Maurice Halbwachs (1992). Collective memory is constituted and shaped through symbols and narratives that reinforce a sense of belonging to a social group. Heroes embody values that are preserved and reproduced through education, rituals and public memory (Assmann, 2011).

The pedagogical utilization of heroic narratives plays a critical role in shaping social and ethical awareness. Heroes' stories function as models for imitation and admiration, allowing children to internalize social values such as justice, solidarity, and responsibility. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning arises from social interactions, and storytelling shapes how children perceive the world. Characters from children's literature, such as Le Petit Nicolas by René Goscinny, contribute to children's socialization by emphasizing cooperation, empathy, and acceptance of diversity (Goscinny & Sempé, 2013).

The necessity for heroes has often been exploited by political and ideological forces. Since the 19th century, Marx's theory of ideology (Marx & Engels, 1970) has highlighted the beliefs, values, and narratives used by dominant classes to legitimize their power and reproduce social relations, thereby consolidating existing social structures. Heroes are frequently employed as instruments of manipulation, projecting values that reinforce authority and entrenched hierarchies. A notable example is wartime propaganda, where military heroes are presented as

paragons of altruism and national duty, strengthening collective consciousness and legitimizing mechanisms of power.

The philosophical dimension of heroism is examined by Friedrich Nietzsche (2008), who introduces the concept of the "Übermensch", an ideal that transcends social conventions and creates new values. Nietzsche views heroic action as an expression of creative power, rejecting mediocrity and striving for personal and societal renewal. However, this interpretation can lead to conflicting views on heroism, as it may justify extreme or oppressive practices.

Max Weber's (2013) social theory offers a different analytical framework, focusing on charismatic leadership. Weber argues that charismatic leaders, often perceived as heroes, gain authority through followers who recognize their exceptional qualities and abilities. Charismatic authority creates a dynamic relationship that, over time, faces institutional pressures. Specifically, the initial authenticity and personal power of charismatic authority tend to be rationalized and integrated into more structured and institutionally established forms of governance.

Social memory and identity are shaped through the construction of heroic figures that serve political and ideological purposes. Pierre Nora (1989) asserts that "sites of memory" construct collective identities and are selected to address historical and political needs. Through this function, heroic narratives do not constitute static or neutral representations but rather dynamic constructions that are reinterpreted according to the demands of each era.

In contemporary times, heroes reflect societal developments and cultural transformations. Scientific and technological discoveries have highlighted new forms of heroes, such as scientists and activists, who continue to inspire and influence modern societies through their contributions to progress and the pursuit of social justice. For example, Malala Yousafzai has become a modern symbol of the struggle for the right to education due to her courageous resistance against restrictive regimes and her dedication to promoting girls' education worldwide. Antonio Gramsci (1971) argues that cultural leaders, including heroes, can shape "hegemony" by promoting specific values and visions that define social structures. Cultural hegemony elevates heroes as ideological figures through which notions of social organization and morality are propagated.

A sociological perspective further emphasizes the importance of collectivity in shaping heroic narratives. Benedict Anderson (1991) introduces the concept of "imagined communities," highlighting how societies construct shared narratives and myths to strengthen their identities. Heroes are central to these narratives, serving as unifying symbols that embody communal values and aspirations.

The prominence of heroes also serves an educational function, particularly in shaping younger generations. Bruno Bettelheim (2010) emphasizes the significance of heroic narratives in children's psychological development, as they offer identification models and moral dilemmas for exploration. References to heroes enhance self-confidence and foster an understanding of responsibility, justice, and solidarity.

Additionally, feminist theories underscore the need for more diverse heroic models that reflect inclusivity and representation. Carol Pearson (2015) contends that modern societies require

narratives that incorporate multiple voices and experiences to ensure equality and recognition of all members of society.

The formation of heroic models is an integral component of social and pedagogical structures, reflecting the necessity for moral and ethical reference points. Heroes are not merely objects of admiration or mythical constructs; they function as carriers of collective perceptions, reinforcing social cohesion and transmitting fundamental values. The way they are portrayed and reproduced in each historical period mirrors societal priorities and pedagogical goals, shaping the framework within which individuals perceive their role in the collective sphere (Bettelheim, 2010; Campbell, 2018; Pearson, 2015).

Heroic narratives are organically integrated into educational processes, helping to form models of emulation and admiration that shape social consciousness. Pedagogical approaches do not randomly utilize heroic figures, as their narratives serve as mechanisms of socialization, guiding perceptions of individual and collective responsibility, social justice, and engagement for the common good. In this context, education does not function as a neutral mechanism for knowledge transmission but as a bearer of values and ideological orientations that influence how individuals internalize societal expectations (Freire, 2000; Kohlberg, 1981; Gardner, 1983).

Heroic figures, as represented in literature, historiography, and educational practices, constitute a core through which society defines and perpetuates its ideals. The study of the pedagogical dimension of heroic narratives reveals that heroes are not merely imaginary or symbolic representations but dynamic tools of social education that connect individuals with the ethical and cultural structures of their time (Gramsci, 1971; Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

5.0 CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN ERA

The social need for hero-role models in Europe reflects the deeper values, ideologies, and societal challenges that contemporary societies face. Childhood is a critical period in identity formation, where role models play a decisive role in shaping children's moral and social consciousness (Kohlberg, 1981; Pearson, 2015). The pedagogical dimension of heroes gains particular significance, as it influences children's moral development, empathy, and social responsibility (Bettelheim, 2010).

In the past, heroic figures were primarily drawn from historical and mythological traditions, promoting values such as bravery, self-sacrifice, and integrity. However, modern reality is characterized by a plurality of role models, with popular figures emerging from the worlds of media, arts, science, and social activism (Gardner, 2006). The influence of pop culture and the entertainment industry is crucial in shaping children's role models, raising questions about the quality of the messages conveyed (Zipes, 2007).

The presence of heroic role models from the past remains important, yet it is not sufficient to address today's challenges. Children seek contemporary role models that reflect their concerns and aspirations, such as environmental consciousness, social justice, and technological innovation. Among modern role models, individuals who have gained prominence through social media occupy a special place, introducing a new type of "everyday hero" who achieves recognition and influence through the portrayal of their personal life and actions (Boyd, 2014).

The conflict between traditional educational values and new role models promoted through social media may have significant implications for education. The new models of heroism, often based on individual success and self-promotion, frequently diverge from the traditional values of collectivism, excellence, and social contribution, which have been consistently cultivated in school and university environments. This shift in orientation necessitates a revision of educational curricula to integrate personal creativity with social and ethical values. The modern heroes emerging through social networks provide new opportunities for self-promotion and individual success. However, education must remain committed to traditional, timeless values such as cooperation, critical thinking, and community responsibility to ensure strong social inclusion for future generations.

The modern era is not characterized by a lack of role models but rather by the diversification of the sources from which they are drawn. The evolution of communication media and globalization has made it possible for new forms of heroes to emerge, transcending national or historical contexts and instead reflecting global challenges and values. The role of education remains crucial in promoting role models that combine ethical integrity, social responsibility, and innovative approaches, integrating traditional values into the modern educational framework. The development of pedagogical practices that critically utilize contemporary standards, encouraging reflection and the active participation of children in the process of selecting standards, emerges as a priority (Freire, 2000; Buckingham, 2012).

6.0 CRITICAL REVIEW - CONCLUSIONS

The social and cultural need for heroic role models remains inextricably linked to the evolution of societies and the cultivation of collective values. Europe, as a cradle of ideological and cultural transformations, has fostered heroic figures that reflect the social conditions and aspirations of each historical period. Heroic narratives are an integral part of identity formation, offering reference points for understanding historical continuity and the values that define each era. The preservation and adaptation of these role models play a significant role in shaping social cohesion and perceptions of morality and justice (Kohlberg, 1981; Pearson, 2015).

The presence of heroes in every culture highlights the connection between social needs and the process of transmitting values. From the mythological figures of antiquity to contemporary cultural representations, heroes serve as carriers of ideological and moral principles, embodying the ambitions, anxieties, and contradictions of each era. In Europe, the heroic tradition is associated with role models that emphasize self-sacrifice, justice, and integrity, elements reflected in both literature and historical narratives. The timeless nature of heroic stories illustrates society's efforts to reproduce values through education, shaping role models that provide children with reference points for understanding the world (Campbell, 2018).

The pedagogical dimension of heroic role models underscores the role of education in shaping children's moral and social consciousness. Throughout history, school curricula have used heroic narratives as a means of reinforcing identity and social cohesion, presenting figures that embody the dominant values of each era. Ancient and modern heroes, through their adventures and actions, not only shape national and cultural consciousness but also serve as reflections of fundamental societal values. The heroic role models emerging from classical and contemporary narratives promote children's moral development, fostering values such as bravery, solidarity,

responsibility, and justice. These values not only shape young individuals' characters but also guide their behavior as members of a broader society (Gardner, 2006).

In the modern era, the dissemination of cultural role models through cinema, television, and social media has transformed the concept of the hero. Children are increasingly exposed to role models shaped by the entertainment industry, often leading to a departure from the classical notion of the hero as a figure of social responsibility and moral integrity. Superheroes, science fiction characters, and animated protagonists dominate children's imaginary worlds, presenting a contemporary view of heroism and the idea of transcendence. These portrayals are promoted through mass media, film, and television series, within a cultural landscape that extends to the entertainment, gaming, and advertising industries, shaping the values and perceptions of younger generations. The influence of social media has introduced a new kind of role model, public figures who shape perceptions through their online presence, often without possessing genuinely heroic qualities. Today's youth increasingly seek role models not only in mythological or historical figures but also in everyday individuals who have gained recognition through digital platforms (Gardner & Moran, 2006).

The education system is called upon to address this shift by integrating critical perspectives on the concept of heroism and moral commitment. The teaching of heroic narratives cannot be limited to simply recounting stories but must emphasize the connection between heroes and their social and cultural contexts. Focusing on analyzing the values conveyed by heroic figures can help develop students' moral reasoning, enhancing their ability to discern the authenticity and significance of the role models they adopt. Pedagogical approaches must recognize children's need to identify with role models that reflect contemporary concerns, incorporating heroic figures that express the importance of solidarity, environmental consciousness, and social justice.

The concept of the hero remains fundamental to Europe's cultural identity and the value system of future generations. The historical continuity of the heroic figure highlights the need for a continuous adaptation of role models to social changes while maintaining a connection with historical tradition. The European cultural heritage possesses a rich repository of heroic figures that continue to influence the formation of children's identities, while education serves as the primary domain where the significance of these role models can be highlighted. Maintaining a balanced approach that combines historical perspective with contemporary realities can contribute to a framework in which future generations can choose heroic role models that reinforce their moral and social development.

REFERENCES

Anderson, B. R. O. (1991). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. Verso

Assmann, J. (2011). Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination. Cambridge University Press.

Bettelheim, B. (2010). The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales. Vintage.

boyd, d. (2014). It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens. Yale University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1981). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press

Buckingham, D. (2012). The material child: Growing up in consumer culture. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 33(6), 913-925. https://doi.org/10.2307/23356941

Campbell, J. (2018). The hero with a thousand faces (3rd ed.). New World Library.

Collodi, C. (2021). The adventures of Pinocchio (C. Della Chiesa, Trans.). Independently published. (Original work published 1883)

Durkheim, É. (2001). The elementary forms of religious life. Oxford University Press

Forsythe, G. (2006). A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War. University of California Press.

Freire, P. (1998). Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage. Rowman & Littlefield

Freire, P. (2000). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum.

Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences. Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (2006). Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice. Basic Books.

Gardner, H., & Moran, S. (2006). The science of multiple intelligences theory: A response to Lynn Waterhouse. Educational Psychologist, 41(4), 227–232. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4104_2.

Gibson, A. (1990). Don Quixote. In Reading Narrative Discourse (pp. 26-40). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20545-5_2

Goscinny, R., & Sempé, J.-J. (2013). Le petit Nicolas. IMAV Editions.

Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the Prison Notebooks. International Publishers.

Granger, J. (2009). Harry Potter's Bookshelf: The Great Books behind the Hogwarts Adventures. Berkley

Halbwachs, M. (1992). On Collective Memory. University of Chicago Press.

Hamilton, E. (2011). Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes. Grand Central Publishing.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). Essays on moral development, Volume One: The philosophy of moral development. Harper & Row.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice. Harper & Row.

Lagerlöf, S. (1995). The wonderful adventures of Nils. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1906)

Lane Fox, R. (2008). The classical world: An epic history from Homer to Hadrian. Basic Books.

Loomis, R. S. (2000). The Development of Arthurian Romance. Dover Publications

Malory, T. (1889-1891). Le Morte d'Arthur: The original edition of William Caxton, now reprinted and edited with an introduction and glossary (H. O. Sommer & A. Lang, Eds.). D. Nutt

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1970). The German ideology. International Publishers Co

Montgomery, L. M. (2017). Anne of Green Gables (Illustrated Novel). Seven Seas

Nagy, G. (1998). The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (2008). The birth of tragedy (D. Smith, Trans.). Oxford University Press

Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. Representations, 26, 7-24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520

Pearson, C. (2015). The hero within: Six archetypes we live by. Harper One.

Piaget, J. (1962). Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood. W.W. Norton & Company.

Seliger, A., & Seliger, D. (2001). Die Rückkehr des Till Eulenspiegel: Neue Schelmenstreiche [In German]. Amicus-Verlag

Sepulveda, N. (2012). The importance of education from a global perspective: Teaching Don Quixote in the 21st century. HIM 1990-2015, 1371. Retrieved from https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses1990-2015/1371

Thunberg, G. (2019). No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference. Penguin.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Harvard University Press.

Weber, M. (2013). Economy and society (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press

Zipes, J. (2007). Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre. Routledge.