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# Teaching Practice Analysis of Integrating Historical Resources into Moral Education for Middle School Students

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore how to effectively integrate rich historical resources into the teaching practice of moral education for middle school students. The article first clarifies the connotations of historical resources and moral character, analyzing the inherent logical connection between the two. Secondly, it elaborates on the contemporary value of integrating historical resources into moral education from the three dimensions of cognitive deepening, emotional cultivation, and behavioral guidance. Finally, based on the theories of critical thinking and constructivism, it proposes systematic application strategies and improvement paths, hoping to provide references for enhancing the effectiveness and humanistic quality of moral education for middle school students.

**Keywords:** Historical Resources; Moral Education; Teaching Strategies; Critical Thinking

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and value pluralism, moral education for middle school students faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Traditional educational methods, primarily based on one-way indoctrination, increasingly show limitations in cultivating citizens with independent thinking abilities, sound moral judgment, and profound humanistic care. Concurrently, there is a growing recognition within the education sector that the purpose of education extends beyond imparting practical skills to include motivating, awakening, and inspiring students<sup>[1]</sup>. Furthermore, the development of moral character is not rooted in the rote memorization of abstract doctrines, but rather emerges through sustained critical thinking and affective experience within authentic or simulated complex scenarios. In this process, the unique educational value of historical resources needs to be re-examined and systematically explored. Integrating historical resources into moral education is not simply about “telling stories of the past”; it aims to guide students to delve into historical contexts, confront the eternal propositions and moral dilemmas in the development of human society, thereby achieving coordinated development at the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels.

## **2. The Connotation of Historical Resources and Moral Education and Their Logical Connection**

### **2.1. The Connotation and Educational Value of Historical Resources**

Historical resources refer to various records and traces formed and preserved by human beings in past social practice activities, including written historical materials (such as classics, archives, letters), physical relics (such as cultural relics, buildings, sites), oral history, and audiovisual materials, etc. From an educational perspective, historical resources are not merely cold accumulations of facts but are valuable carriers bearing the common experiences, wisdom, and profound lessons of humanity. They truly record the successes, failures, contradictions, and choices of human society in its pursuit of survival, development, fairness, and justice. Their educational value lies in providing students with a cross-temporal and spatial “thought experiment field.” In this field, students can confront complex historical situations, understand the behavioral motivations and value choices of people in different eras and cultural backgrounds, thereby transcending the limitations of a single culture or era and cultivating a broader historical perspective and humanistic care based on common human experience. This perspective and care are essential foundations for forming sound moral judgment.

### **2.2. The Contemporary Connotation and Goals of Moral Education**

In the context of contemporary education, the core goal of moral education has shifted from the mere indoctrination of behavioral norms to striving to cultivate students’ stable moral character and mature moral judgment. It emphasizes universal values (such as respect for life, pursuit of justice, pursuit of truth, advocacy of benevolence, and taking responsibility) as the cornerstone, and aims to enable students to independently conduct moral reasoning and make responsible ethical choices in a complex modern society by developing their critical thinking, empathy, and self-reflection abilities<sup>[2]</sup>. This process emphasizes students’ initiative, experiential learning, and constructiveness, stressing the unified development of moral cognition, moral emotion, and moral behavior.

### **2.3. The Inherent Logical Connection Between the Two**

There is a natural and profound inherent logical connection between historical resources and moral education, which forms the theoretical foundation for their integration.

First, history provides a concrete narrative carrier for morality. Abstract moral principles and values, such as “courage” “integrity” and “justice” are often difficult for middle school students to deeply understand and internalize if they remain at the conceptual level. Historical narratives place these abstract concepts within specific characters, events, and conflicts. For example, by exploring the understanding and practice of “justice” in different civilizations, students can gain a deeper understanding of its complex connotations rather than accepting a single, rigid definition. This process of concretization makes moral learning vivid and infectious.

Second, history is an excellent field for cultivating critical thinking. The core of moral judgment is critical thinking. Historical research is essentially a process of critical inquiry, requiring researchers to discern the authenticity of historical materials, consider the perspectives and limitations of historical actors, and analyze the multiple causal relationships of events. When students encounter different records and interpretations of the same historical event, they are forced to think: “Why are there different accounts?” “Which evidence is more credible?” “What constraints did decision-makers face at the time?” This training directly forges students’ spirit of inquiry, awareness of evidence, and ability to analyze from multiple perspectives, all of which are indispensable thinking tools for complex moral reasoning.

Finally, historical contexts are a natural source of moral dilemmas. History is full of various moral dilemmas and difficult choices, providing students with a “safe” practice field for moral deliberation. For example, under the theme of war and peace, one can explore the conflict between personal loyalty and national justice, or between short-term interests and long-term well-being. By analyzing these real (rather than fictional) dilemmas, students can practice weighing various interests, considering different value sequences, and thus enhance their ability to resolve real-life moral conflicts under the guidance of teachers.

### **3. The Significance and Value of Integrating Historical Resources into Moral Education for Middle School Students**

Systematically integrating historical resources into moral education holds irreplaceable value for the personality development and civic literacy enhancement of middle school students.

#### **3.1. Cognitive Deepening Value: From Memorizing Historical Facts to Understanding Human Nature**

Traditional history teaching sometimes falls into the mechanical memorization of dates and events. When historical resources serve moral education, the focus of learning shifts from “knowing what happened” to “understanding why it happened and what it means to us.” By exploring the choices and consequences of historical figures, students can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of human nature, the laws of social operation, and the relationship between power and responsibility. This understanding helps them form a more mature and dialectical worldview, recognizing that social progress often moves forward twists and turns, thereby cultivating their historical patience and practical insight.

#### **3.2. Emotional Cultivation Value: Cultivating Empathy and Humanistic Care**

History is woven from the life stories of countless individuals. Reading a wartime letter from home, examining a piece of art from a time of suffering, or learning about a historical figure who struggled for their beliefs can effectively stimulate students’ emotional resonance. This ability for “empathy” across time and space is the core of moral emotion. It enables students to incorporate the suffering and joy of others into their own emotional experience, thereby softening prejudices and fostering a deep spirit of humanistic care and a sense of responsibility for the common destiny of humanity. This emotional experience is the most effective catalyst for the internalization of morality.

#### **3.3. Behavioral Guidance Value: Drawing on Historical Wisdom to Guide Current Choices**

Learning from history allows one to understand the rise and fall of nations. Although history does not simply repeat itself, the patterns it reveals about success and failure, the consequences of cooperation versus confrontation, etc., still hold important lessons for today’s society. By analyzing historical lessons, students’ awareness of ecological ethics can be strengthened; by studying the exchanges and conflicts between different civilizations, their cultural inclusivity and wisdom for peaceful coexistence can be cultivated. Historical resources provide students with a rich “case library” that can provide deep-level thinking reference and value guidance when they face moral choices in real life.

### **4. Application Strategies and Improvement Paths for Integrating Historical Resources into Moral Education for Middle School Students**

To achieve the transformation from simple “grafting” to deep “integration” of historical resources and moral education, educators must transcend the traditional model of moralizing by telling historical stories and construct a scientific, systematic teaching practice framework centered on critical thinking training and guided by universal values. This framework covers three interrelated dimensions: resource selection, teaching methods, and the role of the teacher, aiming to ensure the theoretical depth and operational effectiveness of teaching practice.

#### **4.1. Diversification of Resource Selection and Guidance by Universal Values**

Historical materials are important educational resources that can provide students with rich historical information and help them analyze history from multiple perspectives<sup>[3]</sup>. In the context of globalization, resource selection must adhere to an open, diverse, and comparative perspective, aiming to cultivate students’ global awareness and cross-cultural understanding.

First, a resource matrix of “local-global” mutual reference should be constructed. On the one hand, it is necessary to deeply explore the excellent moral traditions and cultural wisdom contained in local history, such as the principle of “do

not do to others what you do not want done to yourself” in Chinese Confucian thought, or typical cases reflecting national integrity and patriotic sentiment in history. On the other hand, it is essential to actively expand the horizon to the scope of world history, selecting materials that reflect the common destiny and universal concerns of humanity, such as the discourse on “justice” and “courage” in ancient Greek philosophy, the call for “humanity” and “dignity” during the Renaissance, and the pursuit of peace, environmental protection, and human rights globally since modern times. Comparing Wen Tianxiang and Thomas More under the common theme of adherence to ideals and beliefs, or dialoguing between the ancient Chinese thought of “benevolent governance” and the “social contract” theory of the Enlightenment, can help students understand the universality of moral values and their unique expressions in different cultures. This comparison is not to judge which is superior or inferior, but to reveal the common dilemmas and diverse wisdom of humanity on the path to pursuing truth, goodness, and beauty.

Second, a resource screening standard centered on stimulating ethical deliberation should be established. The primary value of a resource should not lie in its perfect fit with a single historical narrative, but in whether it can effectively stimulate students’ deep thinking about universal ethical issues. An ideal teaching resource should possess one or several of the following characteristics: First, it presents clear moral dilemmas, such as a historical real-world version of the “trolley problem” forcing students to make choices in dilemmas. Second, it contains value conflicts and tensions. For example, the huge contrast between the ideal of “all men are created equal” in the American Declaration of Independence and the reality of slavery in history guides students to think about the complex relationship between ideal and reality. Third, it reveals the complexity and limitations of historical figures. Avoiding stereotypical portrayals allows students to recognize that even great historical figures made decisions constrained by their times, cognition, and information, thereby cultivating their historical sympathy and critical awareness. Ultimately, resource selection should serve a core goal: guiding students from memorizing “historical facts” to exploring the “reasons” behind them and deliberating on “values”.

#### **4.2. Contextualization of Teaching Methods and Problem Orientation**

Selected resources need to be transformed into effective moral learning experiences through carefully designed teaching methods. The core of teaching should shift from knowledge transmission to thinking training and situational experience, with the key being to create a “historical thinking situation” that allows students to develop moral judgment in practice.

First, teachers guide students to use original historical materials for critical inquiry. This is the core method of placing students in the position of historical researchers. Teachers should provide screened, age-appropriate original historical materials (such as diaries, decrees, treaties, news reports, archaeological discoveries, etc.) and design driving question chains to guide students through the complete thinking process of “contacting evidence - raising hypotheses - arguing viewpoints - reflecting on limitations.” For example, when exploring the Industrial Revolution, reports from factory owners, testimonies from workers, archives from government investigation committees, and contemporary cartoons can be presented simultaneously. Questions can then be posed: “What kind of social picture can you outline from these interrelated and even contradictory historical materials?” “How did different groups understand ‘progress’ differently?” “What moral costs did society pay at that time?” This process not only trains students’ ability to critically discern information sources but also makes them deeply realize that historical conclusions are not predetermined facts but constructions based on evidence, which is crucial for cultivating their independent personality that does not follow blindly or believe biasedly in the information age.

Second, organize structured discussions on moral dilemmas. Moral dilemma questions based on real historical events are a “whetstone” for honing moral reasoning skills. The key to a successful discussion lies in the design of the question, which must have real moral tension and no obvious “standard answer”. For example, a discussion can be designed around the “Manhattan Project”: “Should scientists continue to participate when they know their research results may lead to massive destruction?” “How should one choose when personal loyalty to the country conflicts with responsibility to humanity as a whole?” The teacher acts as a “neutral moderator” and “guardian of thinking rigor” in this process. Their task is not to provide answers but to promote the deepening and refinement of students’ thinking through probing

questions (e.g., “What is your basis for judgment?” “Can you think from the opposite perspective?” “Can this principle be universalized?”), encouraging them to consider consequences, examine principles, and weigh value sequences.

Third, carry out deeply immersive role-playing and simulation activities. This method puts situational learning theory into practice, promoting “shared reasoning” through “empathy”. Simulated role-playing is an instructional activity designed using a task-based approach<sup>[4]</sup>. Let students play roles in specific historical situations (e.g., representatives of various countries at the Paris Peace Conference, experts on a scientific ethics review committee) to conduct research, debate, and make decisions to complete a certain task. During the preparation process, students need to deeply understand the positions, interests, and values of the roles they play. In the simulation, they not only have to defend their own views but also respond to others’ challenges and may have to make compromises under pressure. This wholehearted engagement allows them to profoundly experience the difficulty and complexity of historical choices, understanding that any decision is made under specific constraints, thereby cultivating their ability to think from others’ perspectives and the wisdom to seek consensus in complex reality.

#### **4.3. Transformation of the Teacher’s Role and Professional Development**

Profound changes in teaching models inevitably require a fundamental transformation of the teacher’s role. Fostering the professional development and transformation of the teaching workforce has become a widely adopted strategy in the international community<sup>[5]</sup>. Teachers should change from being mere transmitters of knowledge to being guides of learning, facilitators of discussion, and coaches of critical thinking.

This new role places higher professional demands on teachers. First, a solid foundation in history and an interdisciplinary knowledge structure are needed to skillfully handle diverse historical resources and insightfully perceive their underlying ethical implications. Second, keen ethical insight and value clarification ability are required to identify core value conflicts in students’ diverse opinions and guide them in systematic deliberation, rather than engaging in value indoctrination. Third, proficient classroom dialogue and facilitation skills are necessary to create a safe, open, and mutually respectful discussion atmosphere, ensure all students can participate actively, and keep the discussion on a high-quality, rational track. To support teachers in this transformation, schools and educational authorities must provide systematic, ongoing professional development support. This includes organizing workshops on “historical material teaching methods” and the “Socratic method”; establishing cross-school and cross-regional teacher professional learning communities to jointly develop, observe, and evaluate teaching cases; and inviting experts in history, philosophy, and ethics to exchange and learn with teachers to enhance their theoretical literacy. The professional growth of teachers is key to the successful implementation of this teaching reform.

Integrating historical resources into the moral education of middle school students is a challenging and profoundly meaningful educational practice. It requires teachers to adopt an open and rational attitude, shifting the focus of teaching from the one-way transmission of values to cultivating students’ moral judgment and sound character through the critical exploration of history. By carefully selecting resources containing universal values, creating problem-oriented thinking situations, and building matching teaching methods, students can be enabled to understand human nature more profoundly, thereby becoming the next generation of citizens who have the courage to take social responsibility and possess a global perspective.

#### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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