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Psychological and pedagogical views on literary speech of children's literature

Abstract:

This article approaches storytelling as an educational method and learning tool by trying to identify how it can be applied in education. The aim is to examine how the fairy tale, an integral part of the oral tradition interacts with the literary texts and helps the reading child to become aware of literature and a conscious lifelong reader.

This is a study which analyses children's responses to literary stories read aloud and how they develop as individuals in a literature based instruction.

Keywords:

Children's literature, storytelling, emotional development, responses.

1. Introduction

Modern child is a member of a multicultural society and recipient of knowledge and information widespread quickly due to high technology and mass media. Social changes and new trends come as a result of the consumerism that characterizes the modern lifestyle. These trends restrict humans in search of material enjoyment, without focusing on spiritual merits. These living conditions lead to isolation, selfishness, competition and worsen the social differences.

Teachers concerned about the social problems intend to teach their young students, focusing on strategies and educational material that can promote their students self-esteem, emotional maturity, critical ability, willingness for cooperation, and respect for cultural diversity and so on and so forth.

Literature offers aesthetic enjoyment and causes strong emotions to the reader, and at the same time is an essential factor in shaping attitudes and behavior to the reader and raises awareness on contemporary social issues.

It should be noted that the storytelling as art and technique, but also as a means of entertainment and education gradually asserting itself in our societies, both in the context of education, as well as within cultural institutions.

2. Objectives

This research focus on the children's involvement in a storytelling situation and how they react to the message and the images a story convey. Specifically, the research is structured to fulfil the following aims:

1. To examine how fairy tales can be used as an educational method and learning tool to promote literacy
2. To examine the children responses to the literary texts they are introduced by the storyteller/teacher.
3. To examine the impact of storytelling to the child's perspective development as independent and aesthetic readers.

Children's literature main purpose is to motivate children aesthetically taking into consideration their needs. When children enjoy literary texts, they are encouraged without much effort to develop their cognitive, emotional and social skills. Specifically, the emotional development of the children goes hand in hand with psychokinetic development and it is satisfied with the use of appropriate tools, such as objects, pictures, colors and materials familiar to children. (Piaget 1962, Vygotsky 1978)

Children literature books and especially fairy tales can do so much for children according to Michele Landsberb, a Canadian critic. He claims that the good books "*expand horizons and instil in children a sense of the wonderful complexity of life. No other pastime available to children is so conducive to empathy and the enlargement of human sympathies. No other pleasure can so richly furnish a child's mind with the symbols, pattern, depths and possibilities of civilization*" (cited in Hunt 1996,17)

Children's literature gives the reading child a greater understanding of the world. *a story is a picture that arouses intense interest and feeling. — a story, as we use the term in literature, must have an emotional appeal. In the words of Sidney Hartland, one of the greatest authorities on fairy tales and the power of the story, it is a picture presented to the mind's eye that arouses intense interest and feeling.*(Cather 1921)

The kids respond to a literary text in various ways. The kind of response is very personal every time. The feedbacks are expressed verbally and in written. The teacher or parent can understand and non-verbal responses such as body movements, that indicate the interest or not for a book or a story.

The reader response theory provides a perfect background for teachers who want to involve their young students in a more active way of learning and provide them with the opportunity to express their feelings about the magical world a writer has created. Rosenblatt has defined two stances of reading- the efferent and the aesthetic one. The efferent stance involves reading in a surface level with informative input. Aesthetic reading involves a more close reading of a text and a greater understanding of deeper meanings, feelings and images a text conveys.(Rosenblatt, 1995)

If teachers of literature make an effort to understand their students' responses in literature based instruction, they will probably form eager and lifelong readers that discover pleasure in reading. Children will be very satisfied with the books they read if the teacher uses reader response theories as a basis to literature teaching.

3. The power of storytelling. Theoretical framework

Storytelling is an ancient art, and it revives nowadays at storytelling festivals, in libraries, at cultural places and in classrooms. The storyteller stands in the middle of a group of children and people. The relationship of the narrator and the audience is not passive and impersonal, but interacting. This communication is accompanied by gestures, silences and glances interchanged in an outgoing way, during the process of storytelling. The narrator and the audience make a direct eye contact. The process of storytelling is a mutual exchange of physical, facial and vocal expressions. The narrative depends on the desire of the listener to listen, to imagine, to dream and then to create. If someone can dream with open eyes, and can share his dream with a great public then his dreams become collective, dreams of the community. (Pelagos 2008:18)

The folktales are cultivated through the living language of a community, its myths, dreams and passions. The folk narrator is the mask of collegiality. Storytelling relies on the listener and the teller. Storytelling as performing art is an important method for sharing knowledge. Young children experience literature with stories read aloud and tales told by their parents. Later at school children are engaged in literature texts in multiple activities. As the American critic Leslie Fielder points out the children books and stories introduce all plots used in adults' works and that adults' responses are frequently based on forgotten or dimly remembered works from childhood. (Hallet & Karesk 2001:9)

4. Children responses to storytelling

Rosenblatt has defined the reader's response to a literary text with the following statement: *The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text.* (Rosenblatt, 1995)

The interaction between the text and the reader is very strong. So, if the child listens to stories from parents and teachers, it will gain the experience needed to become a mature reader. Examples of famous writers and storytellers show the impact of fairy tale on their professional writing career.

Hans Christian Andersen is recognized as a great creator, because he gave the tale a special place in literature. Leaving behind the traditional way of writing, his tales combine emotion and tenderness, joy and sadness. „I draw power from the wealth of my heart,” he said, and all his stories were written „spontaneously to tell them to our children” (Eskarpi 1995:107). Andersen used traditional themes renewing them with poetic creativity. In 1838 Andersen wrote a short introduction to the third volume of Fairy tales told for children and he says about the folk tales he knew from his childhood, some of which he has used himself “ *I have retold them in my own way, allowing myself any change, I found suitable, letting fantasy refresh the fainted colors of the pictures.*” (Johan de Mylious)

Our Greek storyteller E. Trivizas characteristically answers to a journalist’s question about how and when he started writing. „When I was a little boy and I was told a fairy tale” Nothing more ordinary, and yet this young boy has become a talented writer. He continues „..... I felt betrayed when they came to the end and I heard that “they lived happily ever after. » «They could have lived happily but I was disappointed. So, I tried to imagine what would happen if the story continued. Sometimes, I gave first aid to the defeated dragon, sometimes I tried to find where was the eighth neglected dwarf, sometimes I tried to guess what was the last dream Sleeping Beauty had seen, before she woke up, sometimes I tried to find the cobbler who had made the shoes of Puss in Boots. This desire for a story never comes to an end, was the reason to start writing my own tales.,,

The famous storyteller Agni Stroumbouli, in a conversation with a journalist, mentioned the first stories read aloud to her: „When I was little my second sister read to me the tale of Rapunzel. The only phrase, I remember from then, is an expression that made me cry: ‘Maroulitsa, this is your aunt, throw down your hair. , This little girl imprisoned in a big tower made me burst into tears, and every night I would ask my sister to read the same story once again ... ,,(Agni Stroumbouli)

5. Fairy tales as literary genre.

Narrative texts have the structure of oral narrative: repetitive motifs, repetitions, lullabies that cause an auditory magical atmosphere, dialogical parts that give vitality to the narrative, detailed descriptions. We must not forget the supernatural elements mixed with reality and the use of magical elements such as fairies, witches and animate objects like boots, magical sticks, talking animals and creatures that change shape and form.

The contemporary literature for children and young is an extension of the traditional folk tales, myths and legends of the oral tradition. In the stories the main heroes are knights, princesses, kings, ordinary people like young children, old grannies, woodcutters, animals, supernatural beings and so on all blend in heroic adventures and magi-

cal worlds. Many contemporary writers draw their inspiration, patterns and characters from traditional literature. A way of recording new texts is that of transcription, a merging of traditional shapes and contemporary references in plots that seem unfamiliar to the reader, but selected to stimulate the interest and curiosity.

Modern writers engage readers in unusual experiences and play roles similar to those of storytellers of old times, who fascinated the audience with lively stories, exposed orally from generation to generation.

Young readers are invited to see the structures of the narrative and play with the literary choices of the author and discover the magic of the plot. Modern children's literature highlights its pedagogical role by engaging the reader in creative activities that can easily be used as material for creative writing exercises and reading in class.

6. Storytelling in classroom and the role of the teacher

Applebee (1978) has studied the children's reactions to storytelling and has proven that children have the ability to connect the plot and the characters of the stories to their own daily routine. Wells (1986) has also pointed out that storytelling can help children be literary aware and he examined how to introduce storytelling as teaching process into the curriculum. There are many scholars that appreciate the values of storytelling as an educational tool.

Storytelling can be used in school as a holistic method of learning because it introduces to children many patterns of language acquisition. Storytelling provides children to a great variety of story experiences; It also gives the reading child the opportunity to become familiar with the characteristic features of the folk tales that can enrich their experience of story patterns, themes, characters, and incidents to help them improve their own literacy learning.

Many of the stylistic devices used in fairy tales offer opportunities of language learning. Stories are rich in vocabulary; they incorporate narratives and dialogical parts, alliteration, contrasts, intertextuality- tools that promote language acquisition (Cameron L. 2001). Children can also appreciate literature in an amusing way and even the most reluctant student can be motivated in the storytelling process.

The educational benefits are numerous, because the tale is an institution that promotes culture through folk wisdom. The tale transmits messages in a playful manner and it can be didactic without being formal and depressive.

The tale in the hands of the teacher can help the child to define the world around it and become the same creator. The classroom, especially for the children of the first grade of primary school can become a writing workshop. The children with the tales discover themselves and the world around them. Creative writing as an artistic expression helps

to harmonize the inner world with reality. The children can experiment with words and play.

The example of many teachers involving storytelling in teaching is promising. Their role, however, must be mediating and inspirational. The role of the teacher who puts the student in the learning process is to give the motive of joy and dream. Children should be motivated to read. This motivation will be encouraged if children are exposed to procedures that are provided in storytelling sessions at home and at school.

7. Action Research

The experience, we have as educators, enables us to examine how storytelling can help children approach a literary text and how they respond to it. That is why we applied an action research with the children of the Single Parent Families Association in Alexandroupolis.

Reading fairy tales is an interactive form of communication that takes place between the narrator and the live audience. The target group was young children between the ages of four to ten. Four sessions were held at the site of the Single Parent Families Association in Alexandroupolis, in a specially designed space for children that works as a playroom. Kids were gathered there for games every Monday afternoon when the meetings of parents were held. The audience participation in the storytelling sessions was voluntary and the number of children was sufficient but different every time. The average group was ten to twelve kids. The stories read aloud included folk tales, adaptations of Greek myths and revised version of classic fairy tales into more modern variations.

At the storytelling sessions the children were seated in a semi-circle around a big wooden desk and they could have access to the material that accompanied the storytelling process such as books with illustrations, puppets, extra pictures, pictured dictionaries and posters. We read aloud the story from the book each time and when it was necessary we asked children relevant questions about the content of the story, showed them the illustrations of the book and explained phrases and unknown words to clarify some points of the story and to attract their interest. After the story was read aloud, we discussed the content of the story as a follow up activity and paid great attention to children's answers and comments. After some minutes of discussion the children were allowed to enjoy themselves as they wished with some kind of mediated motivation which included arts and crafts creations related to the main characters of the story, poster creation and painting.

The observations of the research rely on children's responses during the reading of the story. During the course of reading fairy tales, children participated with interest and requested to listen to their favorite stories. The reading of the story, the interaction between the storytellers and the audience and the discussions after were recorded with a camcorder.







8. The pleasure of reading. a brief outline of data analysis

Throughout the storytelling sessions the children as listeners attended with highly increasing interest and made direct connection with the meaning of the story to their own daily routine.

The first tale we read aloud was “*The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep*” a literary fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. The story is about two china household objects that fall in love. Children were very stirred by the animation of the china objects and their adventures that, at the following session, they brought with them their favorite toys and small statues that they have as home decorations.

Another tale that attracted their response was a modern tale by Christos Boulotis. The title of the fairy tale is “The kitten who cries pearls” (Ο Γάτος που έκλαιγε μαργαριτάρια www.biblionet.com). The story and the adventures of this fairy tale are very intriguing and the most remarkable comment was made by a six year old boy who started talking about the habits of his own cat. All children were then motivated and they wanted to tell us stories about their pets. It is also very noticeable that the main character's favorite pastime was to read comics. Children appreciated this element a lot and they were motivated to talk about their favorite comic heroes and once again, they brought, at the following session, their comics to show them to us.

Children at this age are inspired by the plot and the characters of the fairy tales and they are highly motivated without much effort. As Appleyard has pointed out that “in the preschool year the child, not yet a reader but listener to stories, becomes a confident player in a fantasy world that images, realities, fears and desires forms that the child learn to sort out and control.”(Appleyard 1991)

When we read aloud an adaptation for children of the classic story of “The Happy Prince” by Oscar Wilde, a six year old girl was so inspired that she proposed to write down our own fairy tale entitled the “Rainbow Village”. She proposed this lovely title all by herself and she started to narrate the basic idea of the tale. The rainbow village is a modern place where all buildings would be painted in the shades of a rainbow. She made a big list of the buildings included, and, at last, she came down with the idea to write about the hospital of the village where poor people would find care and food. It is remarkable, that her idea does not seem to have a direct connection to the fairy tale of the happy prince, but her last comment, about the poor, gives us the impression that she was totally motivated by the meaning of the original story and she implemented the main idea into a new context.

Older children at the ages of seven to ten respond to literature as hero and heroine according to Appleyard. Children of this age are identical to the heroes of the story they read or hear. The comfort of this identification meets their need for models of behavior that will show them how to face with courage their difficulties and anxieties. Children dream to fulfill their own dreams and aspirations through the adventures of the hero.

“The school-age child is the central figure of a romance that is constantly being rewritten as the child’s picture of the world and of how people behave in it is filled in and clarified. Stories here seem to be an alternate, more organized, and less ambiguous world than the world of pragmatic experience, one the reader easily escapes into and become involved with.” (Appleyard, 1991)

In the following storytelling session we read to the children a traditional Greek version of the tale of Rapunzel. When the students were asked to make a comment on the context of the story a ten year old girl was totally absorbed by the narration and then she was able to reproduce a long episode of the story in a detailed and eloquent speech referring to the romantic affair between the princess and the knight who rescued her from the cruel dragon. She was already transformed into a gifted and eloquent storyteller who could attract the audience’s attention.

Girls especially, are inspired by the romantic element of the story. The blending of magical and romantic features in a story makes the audience devoted and eager to participate throughout the storytelling session.

Boys, on the other hand, were more interested on the adventure of the brave knight in the forest and the encounters he had with the wild beasts that guarded the tower where the princess was imprisoned.

The research has a fair objective into helping teachers engage their students with storytelling as a playful way of learning.

9. Conclusion and suggestions.

Children in storytelling sessions participated with interest and they developed on emotional, social and cognitive level. Their participation in the storytelling helped them to develop their imagination. The use of the imagination can make and the most unwilling students to respond, because they are engaged into a playful process. Their participation in the storytelling session helped the children to develop other skills as to narrate the story in their own words. They were also able to create and to recount their own original stories.

The storytelling helped children to be concerned about the social problems and they were able to express their deepest feelings and companion for the poor.

Kids as team members learned to work together, to share their thoughts and their feelings and learned to understand themselves and the others. The bonding of the team grew stronger and the children's relationships with their narrators were also very strong.

The children also expanded their knowledge on the literary structure of a fairy tale and they turned into eloquent speakers constructing and organizing their speech to convey clear meanings and integrated stories.

These unique experiences with storytelling influences children's attitudes towards reading books because children at the end of each session showed great interest for the books as objects. They looked closely at the illustrations, they examined the front and the back of the book and even they started reading the story once again on their own. The most remarkable observation was when children started asking questions about the writer of the stories. They were prompted by the photographs of the writers on the back pages of the books. Soon children were aware of the lives of Andersen, Wilde and other famous writers without any specific guided instruction. Children were just motivated to learn new things through storytelling and playing.

We can introduce an optimistic future for the children with fairy tales. The tale is the vehicle to travel through difficulties. a characteristic feature of folk tales is the symbolic elements that are transformed into images - words. The child listening to the story acquires ideas on how to create order in the chaos of the inner life. (Bettelheim 1995: 109).It is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and, who although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deeper inner confidence. (Bettelheim, cited in Hallet and Caresek 2001:315)

The tale is a call to the world of dream and fantasy, where everything is possible and the victory of good over evil cultivates feelings of optimism and pleasure in the reading child.

There are some suggestions for teachers who want to encourage their students into a playful and amusing process of learning through storytelling

Andrew Wright, an experienced storyteller, advises the teacher with the following words *«Dear, devoted language teacher! Don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs! In your anxiety to help the students to develop their language proficiency you might ruin their joy in the story. Now that would be a disaster in so many ways! The goose of the story offers the students the golden egg of a rich experience of language not an opportunity to study it. If you think an activity might destroy experience, don't do it!»*

Christian Poslaniek suggests some tips to give kids appetite for reading books: He suggests offering them a wide variety of books and mostly books that appeal to their imagination.. (Poslaniek 1992: 16-17). It is advisable to invite an author or narrator in the classroom or in the library to motivate the child.

Poslaniek advises the educators to suggest books according to the children wish without forcing them to choose what the educator thinks is most appropriate. He also insists that educators should not ask students account for the book they are reading, because this is an action in vain. Furthermore, the students should express their thoughts freely acting as storytellers themselves. Direct communication through peers or creative writing is an effective way to elicit the meanings of a narrative. The disapproval of the book they are reading is not a correct tactic. (Poslaniek 1992:16-17)

So, innovative teachers can find new teaching methods and engage their students in active situations. The art of storytelling becomes a valuable and effective tool in their hands and provide children with numerous opportunities of aesthetic experiences.

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Internet resources

- Interview with Agni Stroumbouli, <http://peopleandideas.gr/2010/10/12/storytelling-2/>
- Interview with Eugene Trivizas in Theodora Bibila - Remy <http://bemary.com>
- Wright Andrew Responding to Stories <http://andrewarticlesandstories.wordpress.com/articles/responding-to-stories/>
- Johan de Mylius *Orality – Reinvented or Invented*. The Hans Christian Andersen Center at University of Southern Denmark, Odense <http://www2.lingue.unibo.it/acume/acumedvd/Essays%20ACUME/DeMylius.pdf>
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