

Educational and Formative Aspects of Stories in Activities with Preschoolers

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Abstract

The realm of stories is the destination we embark on regardless of age. From the very beginning of life, stories play an important role, in terms of education, formation, instruction, ethics, aesthetics, morality, being both a source of information that quenches our thirst for knowledge, and a blend of messages, perceptions, narratives, images that open the doors of imagination, creativity, thinking, attention, and other mental processes. Whether they are specific stories from preschool literature, stories created especially by educators to convey certain messages, or stories composed by the little ones, in any form they may be, they are a necessity in human life and, especially, in the lives of children.

Keywords: *educational values, preschool education, stories, development, education*

Introduction

Education is a gradual and complex process of accumulating and assimilating new skills, information, abilities, and values, all of which result in positive changes in human life and behavior, essentially facilitating the development of human qualities and the exploration of new cognitive horizons. This process begins early in life through the influence of family, educators, teachers, and so forth.

The foundations of education are established during childhood, particularly in preschool education, as this is where things become clearer, easier to understand, and more easily assimilated by young children. During this period, preschoolers are drawn not only to play but also to other activities specific to their age, such as stories, works of children's literature, which have been present in their lives from the beginning, first as tales told with the purpose of calming, soothing, and putting them to sleep, and later as instruments with strong educational values.

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Body of the Work

Preschool education is the ideal place where young children can satisfy their need for knowledge, feeling, and development. Literature plays an important role in this context. „Literature, like all arts, is called upon to express beauty, unlike science, which deals with truth. The first and greatest difference between truth and beauty is that truth contains only ideas, while beauty encompasses them manifested in sensible matter” (I. Andrău, 1986, p. 11). „Writers dedicated, some exclusively, others tangentially only to our miraculous first age, or rather to the ages of unforgettable memories, which are childhood and adolescence, are also infinitely 'divisible', with forefronts confronting each other, intersecting. This blending of beautiful expression and the richness of ideas and feelings, between expression and substance, therefore, means literature, sometimes great literature, in other words, art” (H. Căndroveanu, 1988, p. 8).

Fiction is a favorite domain of preschoolers. The imaginary world they can easily enter through play, toys, created situations, stories, fairy tales, can serve—and indeed does serve—as a means of education. „Stories are all around us. They are in books and pictures, on TV and in movies, in our dreams and in daytime dreams, in our conversations. Where would we be without them?” (Mary Medlicott, 2019).

As Alberto Manguel said, „Stories create the real world.” In practice, parents and educators can use stories to help children become the creators of their own lives because everything built by themselves is what will define and guide them. „Children's literature is, in fact, simply literature, literature for everyone, beautiful literature” (H. Căndroveanu, 1988, p. 10). Thus, the beauty and enduring value of children's literature can only be sustained by the invaluable worth of the works that compose it. „To realize the instructive-educational and formative value of children's literature, teachers must themselves be passionate readers, know the psychology of ages, appropriate readings, and recommend them in attractive forms such as storytelling, explanatory reading, review, literary gathering, literary anniversaries, and commemorations of writers” (Dumitru Gherghina, Ovidiu Ghidirmic, Ion Buzasi, et al., 2005, p. 157).

This aspect is also valid for preschool education. The educator must be a person passionate about literature, understand the psychology and peculiarities of different age groups, thus ensuring the understanding and acquisition under various aspects (intellectual, moral, and aesthetic) of the content of stories, knowing which stories to choose based on their group, depending on the message they want to convey to the little ones.

For the story, both as a sequence of information and as an educational tool to have the desired impact, several important aspects must be considered, such as creating a suitable atmosphere, the educator's



knowledge of the material, adapting the tone and voice in line with the characters and action, using images, and so forth. „The educator somewhat plays the role of a crystal that polarizes diffuse light and transforms it into rays, which spread out into a splendid rainbow” (S. Herbinier-Lebert).

The themes of the stories, whether realistic or fantastic, differ from one group to another according to the instructive-educational tasks that need to be addressed, and the themes recommended by the curriculum are not limited. Educators have the latitude to select literary material and choose stories that are fully accessible.

Thus, at ages 3-4, the stories presented to the little ones will be short, with simple content and plot, depicting a world known to them, arousing pleasant feelings and affective states, and positive attitudes. At ages 4-5, the stories will present children with distinct aspects of life and activities, different affective experiences with which they will become familiar, aiming to positively influence their feelings and behavior. At ages 5-6, the stories will acquaint the children with more complex aspects both from nature and from the surrounding life, with poetic expressions, epithets, formulas specific to storytelling style, as well as educating them in aesthetic and ethical values that will further influence the feelings and behavior of preschoolers.

Stories play a very important role in education. Through stories, children discover the world and can place themselves in life situations beyond the family context. Through the struggle between good and evil and the encountered conflicting situations, children learn life strategies, discover the consequences of actions and attitudes, and adopt positive social behaviors. Without being forced to go through a negative experience, the child can thus learn to discover the world around them, people, and how they act in different life situations. Many children's stories metaphorically signal the struggle between good and evil, identify the main behavioral typologies, as well as how certain concrete life situations can be resolved.

The storyteller Charles Perrault argued that „All stories tend to show the benefits of being honest, patient, hardworking, obedient, as well as the misfortunes that await those who are not (...) They stir children's desires to resemble the good ones and, at the same time, the fear of the misfortunes that befall the wicked, due to their wickedness.”

Stories stimulate the desire for knowledge, imagination, and creativity in children. Their narrative context facilitates the child's access to new words and expressions, allows the understanding of the meaning of abstract or metaphorical words, thus developing language and thinking. Imagination and creativity play an important role in the child's life



because they help the child establish a connection between their internal and external worlds, build their own self-image, and develop successful strategies for solving problems and identifying solutions in the future.

Under the influence of stories, preschoolers adopt and preserve in their memory dialectical structures, „cultivating an elevated language at kindergarten, to which preschoolers increasingly adhere and then begin to correct even those at home” (T. Crețu, 2009, p. 154). The careful reception of stories and fairy tales contributes, first of all, „to familiarizing preschoolers with the structure of literary language, with the richness and expressiveness of language, by assimilating words with literal and figurative meanings, poetic expressions, specific formulas of stories and fairy tales, rhythmic and rhyming constructions, sayings, proverbs, grammatical structures” (Fl. Mitu, Șt. Antonovici, 2005, p. 30).

Stories strengthen the bond between the child and the educator through the involvement of both parties in an activity that unites them through words, behaviors, and emotional experiences. The educator creates the context, becoming the director of a life scene, while the preschooler lives it. Stories represent the most favorable pretext for establishing a deep connection between the educator and the child, parent and child, or between peers by allocating unique, common time in which the parties strengthen their relationship. „When the storyteller and the child meet, both of their lives are enriched by sharing a story. Because they have laughed together, shared joy or sadness, experienced wonder and emotion, all of these establish a mutual feeling of warmth and camaraderie, an experience worth paying the price for in terms of time and energy” (Eillen Colwell, 1980). „Stories must be offered to children in a way that they can cope with and enjoy them. ... Stories must be communicated in the spirit of discovery, so that the little ones see them as an adventure. Also, they must be communicated in the spirit of creating a relationship” (Mary Medlicott, 2019, p. 13).

Among the most well-known stories for children are „The Three Billy Goats Gruff,” „Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” „Cinderella,” „Little Red Riding Hood,” „The Bear Tricked by the Fox,” „The Three Little Pigs,” „The Two-Penny Purse,” and among the authors, we find the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Ion Creangă, Petre Ispirescu etc.

From the story „The Three Billy Goats Gruff,” children will understand that it is important to listen to their parents, to be obedient, and not to open the door to strangers, while from the story „Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” they will learn to be hardworking, empathetic, with a good heart. Thus, from the positive characters, they will learn beautiful values that they need in life to succeed, and from the negative characters,



they will gather all the details and put them into a chest of behaviors to stay away from.

What remains important beyond listening to stories is reading them by the children themselves and building a pleasure in reading. Teaching children to read means opening the path to intellectual development.

In the Dictionary of Pedagogy, children's literature is identified as the „totality of works from Romanian and universal literature, accessible to children and serving their multifaceted education, with great educational value especially in developing a taste for reading” (G. Văideanu, A. Manolache, D. Muster, 1979, p. 89). In other words, stories are like highly complex educational tools that can be „shaped” according to the needs of each child so that they can develop harmoniously with their help. The tangible benefits of stories are extensive and can be identified based on the more or less significant contribution they make to the education of the child, but especially in maintaining a psycho-emotional balance. When we think of stories, we actually think of the most handy tool we have in developing a relationship with the child.

Regarding the educational benefits of stories, both for the listener and the reader, they help in the development of language, stimulate imagination and the ability to find solutions, teach the distinction between good and evil, help the child to be curious, determined, perseverant, and to trust in their own abilities, help them to express their emotions in a constructive and empathetic manner, help them to respect the feelings/needs of others without resorting to prejudices, help them to assimilate abstract notions, beliefs, moral values (honor, justice, truth, courage etc.), help them to overcome phobias, help them to understand the need for rules and what happens if they are not respected, help them to create moments of intimacy and connection with the parent/caregiver, help them to create a connection between their internal and external world and thus to build their own self-image/reality, offer them a solution that is always at hand to relax, unwind, and regain emotional balance in certain stressful moments, help them to learn about their own limits, and last but not least, are an excellent tool for „sharpening” memory.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, stories are a fundamental element in preschool education and have a profound impact on children's development in multiple domains. From the very beginning of life, they not only fascinate and entertain but also educate, teaching young children about the world around them and about themselves.



Through stories, children learn to express their emotions, understand the difference between right and wrong, develop their imagination and creativity, improve their language skills, and form their willpower and attention. Additionally, stories provide them with positive behavioral models and help them learn about the consequences of their actions.

It is essential for preschool education to actively integrate stories and literature into the learning process, as they are key to shaping educated adults who are passionate about reading and culture. Encouraging children to be part of the world of stories from a young age will give them a considerable advantage in their long-term development.

Thus, stories are not just a form of entertainment but also a powerful tool in children's formation and development, preparing them for life's challenges and providing them with a valuable foundation of knowledge and experiences from the earliest years of life.

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