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**STORY-TELLING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMAGINATION
AND VOCABULARY OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN**

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Abstract

Story telling represents a compulsory activity in the pre-school cycle, having both ethical and aesthetical values as it influences the personality of small children determining the development of their thinking and imagination. The main objective of the storyteller is to stimulate and attract the reader's interest and attention, convincing him about the reality of the events. The stories have an important role in the development of pre-school children's vocabulary. With the help of stories, the children learn to communicate with others using the new words they acquired. The educator has to take into account the operational objectives used in the development of the story telling activity such as: knowledge of literary species appropriate to early ages, the capacity to captivate children during teaching, accessibility of the new words and phrases and selection of significant excerpts. Teacher's stories are expositions or readings of literary works known or elaborated by the teacher under the form of oral activities having a realistic, scientific or fantastic character. The role of the short stories is to develop one single plan, using visual modalities widely. Besides, the short story has the role to cultivate certain experiences, feelings, attitudes, implying for children a very keen engagement. Through the activity of retelling, children have to reproduce real or imaginary facts, to choose the character they liked mostly and to motivate their choice, to retell the main characters' actions. Thus, we can affirm that the stories and short stories are very important in the developing of small children's personality.

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1. Introduction

As a species of the epic genre, the short story comes from sl. povesti (to tell a story) - narration. During the educational process it can be used as a way or a method of instruction (learning) and within the epic genre it is a literary species or a narration method that attracts and delights through its chosen subject and its presented action as well. "From the literary point of view, the short story is a species of the epic genre in prose (or rarely in verse) with cult or popular origins in which the narration, strongly marked by subjectivism, is built through the cancelation of the final act, and concentrates around one unusual event for whose authenticity pleads the narrator himself, who can be a witness or even a character" (Roșu-Stoican, 2014, p. 128). A story is not very long but what matters most is the way the narrator knows how to attract his readers, through the action and the narrative approach. Even though it has strong, subjective accents, the story attracts and delights the listeners by how the narrator tells the story. He engages affectively in the actions of his imaginary heroes. It matters more the way in which the story is told to us, and less the descriptions of the features and the feelings of the involved characters. Usually, there is only one main story line, the method of narration is oral and the language is metaphorical, through the use of some motifs and literary themes with a special symbolism.

The epical discourse of the main story is organized on the following moments: the introductory formula, story preparation, the story proper, the record, the rerecord of the reactions of wonder and delight of the audience, the outcome...." (Roșu-Stoican, 2014, p. 130)

An important particularity of a story in Romanian literature is that it was spread through by word of mouth, orally, being recited in the context of different events, in different backgrounds and its subjects were very attractive succeeding to captivate a large audience. „Story-telling represents a peculiarly complex binary act, a form of oral or written discourse which integrates the account of a sequence of events, real or fictitious, having a general human interest“ (Banța, 2014, p. 26) The exposition and development of the story is realized in a specific place: "the occasions of story-telling are a lot and various; the story –telling takes place in villages and even cities, bending with everyday activities of the people. The occasions in which the stories are told often depend on people's way of living from different places" (Pop & Ruxăndoiu, 1999 p. 196, cited in Rosu-Stoican, 2014, p. 130). Given the chosen topic and the inspiration sources, the story can be mythological - folkloric, fantastic, satirical, historical, religious, for children of all ages.

In Romanian literature, the story was approached by many writers like I.Slavici (*Florita din codru*), I. Creangă (*Moș Ion Roată și Unirea*), B. Șt. Delavrancea (*Sorcova*), I. Al. Brătescu-Voinești (*Niculăiță Minciună*), I. Agârbiceanu, M. Sadoveanu (*Dumbrava minunată*), V. Voiculescu (*Singuri*). In the universal literature, some of the well - knows story writers are N. Gogol, I.Turgheniev (*Poveștile unui vânător - Sketches from a Hunter's Album*) E. Zola (*Povești pentru Ninon - Stories for Ninon*) A. Daudet (*Povestiri din moara mea - Stories from my Windmill*)

2. Problem Statement

The story, as an activity of language education, is attractive and pleasant for children because it accomplishes their need of knowledge and affectivity; it stimulates their imagination forming a necessary way of exercising and developing their communication capacity. It is frequently used at early ages,

because of its unusual, affective, and accessible nature. In many situations, the content of the stories recreates the personal experience of the children, this being the reason why the same story, is told in different ways pervaded with novelty elements which create suspense and attractivity. In *free storytelling*, which may or may not have a suggested beginning, the child can approach various, unimportant aspects or can enlarge the story very much, ending up with an unclear ending; however, the whole process can be useful for the practice of their creative capacity.

Among all the modalities provided by language to us, *story-telling* is the modality that stimulates the child's desire for knowledge and the understanding of the essential outlines of life and of the values of human spirituality. It goes beyond the limits of everyday life and introduces the child in a fantastic world that fascinates and influences him, becoming one of his best trainers in his learning and development process. In the imaginary trips induced by the fantasy of stories and tales, the child feels happy, because he intermingles with characters, he takes part in their actions, good or bad, and even imitates their activity later.

Through their particular features, stories and short stories project the pre-school child in a world in which everything is possible, stimulate and nurture fantasy and dreaming. As a part of the literature for small children and adolescents, stories always find a large audience among children and adolescents because they are based on their affectivity, contributes to the knowledge of the outside world through artistic images, enrich the representation field about the things that happened previously and form a well-balanced attitude.

The short story contribute to the development of small children's imagination by creating new images based on the modification of the representations and of the cognitive experience previously formed. Thus, through illustrations, pictures, slides with various parts of the presented story, children will be able to represent the content and create their own images. The child can be the creator of his own images, the story teller being only the one that suggests them verbally. The child's effort of imagining and understanding trains memory and thinking, will and vocabulary intensely.

Through their content and specific elements, *short stories* represent an accessible modality of experiencing the world, a very subtle way of instruction and education that suggests, through illustrated examples and moral judgments, various ways of becoming alike the presented characters: hard-working, wise, honest, brave, confident, altruist, modest, solidary, etc..

Therefore, the activity of story-telling has a large enough field and "has a multilateral influence on the personality of the pre-school child, contributing to his ethical, aesthetical and cognitive education" (Dumitru, 2007, p. 59).

3. Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated for the present study:

- What is the role of story- telling in language development at preschool level?
- Which are the most appropriate stories according to the different age groups in story-telling activities during the preschool period?

4. Purpose of the Study

The present study aimed at analyzing the role of storytelling in children's ethical, aesthetical and cognitive education and at identifying the most appropriate types of storytelling in language development activities at preschool level. With regard to the types of stories used in kindergarten, Sirghie (2009) considers that there are two main forms of activities - the teacher's stories and children's stories.

As an instructional and educational method, the teacher's stories are oral exposition activities of the content of certain literary, realistic-scientific or fantastic (short stories, tales, legends, ballads, stories) type. As a specific activity of pre-school "education", teacher's stories exercise attention, memory, thinking and fantasy of the children, to whom it gives information about various aspects of the human life, of the vegetable world and of the physical phenomena."(p. 86).

The story has an important contribution to the development of children's logical thinking because they have to memorize the progress of the narrated events and to retell them with the help of specific procedures and methods such as teachers' questions, images, illustrations or drawings etc.

Language – the fundamental means of communication, enriches with story-telling, through the acquisition of new words, specific phrases and also through the practice of speaking, which is very necessary in early childhood.

Language and thinking interact mutually, they act like a unit between the communicational (information transfer) and the cognitive field. Thinking develops through language support, while language reflects the development level of thinking.

The development of little children' attention is stimulated by story-telling to a large extent; children memorize easily characters' names, fragments of stories, the sequence of events, behaviours and characteristics of the participants. Thus, if the teacher tells the story in a correct manner from a stylistic and grammatical point of view, children's language will enrich through specific forms of the literary and common words and phrases without difficulty.

Through listening to short stories or stories, children not only grasp the verbal means used by the teacher, but also memorize the beginning and the ending words or recurrent words in fairy-tales. Thus, literary and popular language enter children's current vocabulary. Preschool children live the scenarios of the stories emotionally, proving an almost incredible growth of the emotional range of nuances related to the characters of the stories, but also to the conflict that arises in the plot. Real and fantastical stories are both accessible to three years old children; they meet their need of knowledge and affectivity and can influence their behaviour.

5. Research Methods

Beside teacher's stories, class activities also use story-retelling, the story after the teacher's model, the story with a given beginning, stories with a given plan, with illustrations, stories with a given topic.

Story-retelling is very important because it exercises children's memory, thinking and language letting them to reproduce a story that they had heard before. Serdean (2008) considers that "this brings the pupils in the situation of exercising the act of speech, even if they do nothing more than reproduce a short story, a tale, a literary text known from the teacher's story, or from its reading" (p. 243). It can be

done using illustrations, plates, pictures or a given verbal content. Through its specific character, story-telling makes the transition to free story-telling.

Children's stories after a plan are an important step in the learning process in the kindergarten because it obliges them to build short stories containing specific elements of fairy-tales' or even with subjects from everyday life. These have a complex role as they stimulate little children to realize, under the attentive coordination of the teacher, stories that emphasize the richness of their vocabulary, the power of memorizing and reproducing, the will, and last but not least, imagination. Children stories about toys, let dolls, animals, means of transport, kits, puzzles, have a concrete, intuitive support which can be personified, becoming the character of an event from an imaginary world, parallel to the real one. (Sirghie, 2009, p. 88)

The topic of stories and short stories is very diverse and includes themes like the child and the childhood in all its significant aspects, stories about the world of the small inhabitants, stories that combine the real elements with the fantastic ones. Hence, numerous stories and fairy-tales are built upon the relation between children and their parents (for example: the step mother, The Evil Queen in the Snow White and Seven Dwarfs, written by Grimm Brothers, the old woman in, the Daughter of the Old Woman and the Daughter of the Old Man by Ion Creangă.)

6. Findings

With the view to reach their educational goal, literary stories presented and narrated in the story-telling activity have to differ from a group to another, according to the age, capacity of understanding and retention of pre-school children.

At the nursery group stories have to be small, easy to understand and attractive, to contain subjects that develop positive feelings and emotional states in children. (*The Huge Radish - Ridichea uriașă, The Goat with Three Kids* etc.)

At the pre-school group, stories must have an educational and formative content in order to help children get used with different aspects of life and influence their behavior in a beneficial way (*Little Red Riding Hood – Scufița Roșie, The Bag with Two Coins – Punguța cu doi bani, The Bear Fooled by the Fox- Ursul păcălit de vulpe*).

At the kindergarten group, stories must have a more complex form, to help children detect the real world from the unreal one, to stimulate their creativity and to exercise their capacity of communication (*Cinderella – Cenușăreasa, The Daughter of the Old Woman and The Daughter of the Old Man – Fata babei și fata moșneagului, The Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs - Albă ca Zăpada și cei șapte pitici, Brave Praslea and the Gold Apples - Prâslea cel voinic și merele de aur*).

7. Conclusion

The importance of stories and short stories resides in their educational and formative character. Through them the child can develop his vision of the world and integrates in life situations that exceed the family area. Due to the motif of the fight between the good and the bad, frequently met in stories, and to diverse conflictual acts, the child assimilates some life strategies, becomes aware of the consequences of bad deeds, being able to form a positive social behaviour.

The Goat with Three Kids and Little Red Riding Hood are two stories with a strong educational impact upon children because they make them become aware of the consequences of disobeying their parents or stepping out of one's way.

Stories help and stimulate the desire for knowledge, creativity and the affectivity of children. Through them, little children enrich their vocabulary with new words and phrases, create their own stories based on real life situations and are emotionally involved with the characters in the actions in which they take part, empathizing with them.

Stories can also strengthen the relationship between the child and his parents, as a common affective relationship is established during the narration or reading, through the participation of both of them in the act.

Therefore, we can say that stories and short stories very beneficial for children, having an overwhelming importance in their development and formation, offering life strategies and models, stimulating their desire for knowledge and creativity and enriching their vocabulary.

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