

Fairy Tales Made From Drawings: Toddlers' Creative Stories

Eleni Ilia

(University of Athens, Greece)

Abstract: The paper presents the narration of original tales by toddlers in the context of animating educational activities, which unfold in the school classroom. The process of producing toddlers' fairy tales begins with questions asked by the teacher and develops according to the principle of declining guidance. Toddlers narratives are recorded and used in many ways. The children's texts presented in the results, are collected by the techniques of random sampling in groups. These are four individual and four group children's texts, stimulated to produce toddlers' drawings. As toddlers enjoy the experience of manifesting their creativity, their inexhaustible imagination and familiarity with the features of the fairy tale emerges. The dominant magical element in the fairy tale is responsible for the fascinating plot in the toddlers' narratives and for the happy ending of each adventure, expressing their optimistic nature and their desire for reward and justification of the heroes.

Key words: creativity, storytelling, toddlers, drawings

1. Introduction

The present work aims to show how theories from the field of narrative and textual linguistics, combined with the characteristics of infancy presented by developmental psychology, are transformed into didactic approaches to the production of original narrative discourses, providing toddlers with valuable, creative experiences, with the ultimate goal of their happiness.

In this particular pedagogical intervention, two twenty-five groups of students of a public Nursery School in Attica, who studied in different school years (2011–2012 and 2014–2015), produced their narrative texts either individually or in groups with the stimulus of their drawings. These are drawings, which were inspired by the ignorance of literary texts, as the nature of literature is inextricably linked to human creativity (Kotopoulos, 2012). This didactic approach is characterized by its playful nature, in accordance with the needs of childhood (Huizinga, 1989). It emphasizes verbal expression and communication between toddlers that fascinate the classroom, presupposes their collective interaction (Gougoulakis, 2012), self-action and initiative.

The active expression of the emotional and spiritual potential of the individual in general, leads to the completion of their personality, from which their happiness arises (Fromm, 1971). The conquest of happiness, which is mainly associated with wisdom, is defined as the ultimate goal of human existence (Aristotle). Thus, even in the case of the narratives produced by toddlers, the experience of creativity ensures enjoyment and efficiency, contributes to their happiness during the educational process.

The title of the work refers to "fairy tales" instead of the more general terms "stories" or "narratives", in

Eleni Ilia, Ph.D., University of Athens; research areas: creative writing, teaching literature to toddlers. E-mail: eliakol67@gmail.com.

order to highlight the spontaneous preference of the children for the magical element, which is the main feature of the fairy tale (Meraklis, 1986), the frequent and appropriate use in their narratives.

2. Principles of the Text-centric Approach

The proposed intervention moves in the context of the text-centered teaching models of written expression. These models teach their students the super propositional rules and structures that distinguish the different types of speech (Matsagouras, 2001). Thus, it is proven that the student gradually becomes more capable in the production of narrative texts and in the way of structuring thought (Matsagouras & Kouloubaritsi, 1999).

3. Methodology of Pedagogical Intervention

Reference points of fairy tales are the drawings of toddlers. Toddlers create their own narrative by first answering the teacher's successive questions. The supplementary, clarifying questions that the educator, as an attentive listener, asked in relation to the previous responses he received (Pascucci & Rossi, 2002), about the actors or the place and time of the action were constantly decreasing, as the toddlers' answers became more complete, according to the teaching principle of declining guidance (Matsagouras, 2001).

The narrative texts produced by toddlers, either individually or in groups (Huck, Hepler and Hickman, 1979), were recorded by the teacher, in traditional or modern ways, such as writing on paper or writing on a computer, as a single text in each case. The teacher immediately read to toddlers the texts he had just recorded, so that they have the opportunity to ascertain the correctness and accuracy of the recording. In this way, they realized the quality of the written speech to faithfully represent the oral one.

This was followed by a varied use of toddlers' fairy tales, such as print and electronic publication or school play, which usually contributes to the opening of the school to the wider society (Grammatas, 2014). The above activities of promoting children's speech function as an additional motivation for free and creative expression of students during the educational process (Ilia & Matsagouras, 2006).

3.1 The Production of Group Fairy Tales

Toddlers draw on the theme of the garden at the four different seasons of the year, among a series of playful activities related to group reading of a literary text (Poslaniek, 1992). After the first four representative drawings for each season by each toddler, it is proposed to continue drawing gardens, this time seeking originality, uniqueness, the choice of the unexpected, with the ultimate goal of humor (Tzaferopoulou, 1995). Each toddler is then asked to choose one of all their drawings, which will be the stimulus for the group narration to unfold by the classmates. All selected drawings are grouped in an envelope, preferably with a floral representation. A draw is then made between the selected drawings to determine the order in which they will be used for group storytelling. After preparing as many lotteries with numbers as there are drawings, each child draws a number, which is written on their chosen drawing. The drawings are then placed in serial number, which is also used as the numbering of the pages of the book to be created. This book is completed when the corresponding group fairy tale of toddlers will be pasted behind each drawing. Finally, it is not omitted to create the e-book with the drawings and the relevant fairy tales on the school blog, so that it can be read by people outside the school classroom. The post precedes the school event during which the toddler group fairy tales are performed as theatrical events, in order to attract more spectators from the wider social environment of toddlers. After the event, the theatrical performance

of the fairy tales is also posted on the blog.

3.2 The Production of Individual Fairy Tales

After reading in the class a literary excerpt from the novel *Aeolian Earth*, which describes the figure of the mermaid (Venezis, 2009), all toddlers were asked to prepare a relevant drawing, so as to express the different, according to the specific characteristics of each of them, reading response to the previous text (Tziovas, 1987). Then, each toddler chooses one of his classmates' drawings, in order to use it as a stimulus for his original narration that follows. At the end of the school year there is also a school event, where all toddlers present their fairy tales to the public.

4. Results

The four group narratives that are quoted have been collected by the technique of random sampling, among the twenty-eight that were produced in total. Both the narratives in their entirety and the garden drawings by toddlers, which served as a stimulus for their production, were posted during the 2014-2015 school year on the blog entitled *ekpaideutika programmata*. literature and education, of the Panhellenic School Network.

The four individual fairy tales for mermaids were selected using the sampling technique in groups, based on the gender and on the other hand the country of origin of their narrators. There were no age differences this year, as only five-year-olds attended the class. The individual fairy tales, accompanied by the corresponding drawings with mermaids, have also been posted in their entirety on the same blog, in 2012.

4.1 Fairy Tales for Gardens

- 1) A witch did her magic and built a glacier in the garden. When the children left the house in the garden, they rested their hand on the glacier, which the witch had cursed. So, they were immediately enchanted, they became bad and damaged, they broke the furniture and the windows. When they had finished, they told the witch "All right". Then the witch froze the whole house and turned the children into ice statues. As soon as their parents who had gone shopping returned, the witch had gone back to her cave. The parents lit flames, and the ice melted after a few hours. The parents did not know how all this had happened. So, they punished their children, to do all the work at home and in the garden. The children could not explain to them what had happened, because the witch had taken their voice. But when the two children started doing the chores, they warmed up and then they could write down everything that happened to the witch. The parents read them and started looking for the witch, to ask for their children's voices back. But they did not find her anywhere. Until one day the children's mom saw her flying with her broom. All witches have magic brooms that fly. Their mom shouted "come here" and the witch went to her. She asked her back for the children's voices, but the witch said no and left with her broom. A fairy had seen all this from above. So, she quietly entered the witch's cave while she was sleeping and took the jar with the children's voices. The next morning when the children woke up, they tried to talk, as they did every day. And this time they succeeded. The witch who woke up and did not find the jar with the voices screamed: "Aha...who took the jar?". And then she cried. She tried many times to get the children's voices again but the fairy always made sure the voices turned back to the children. So the witch gave up.
- 2) A magician lowered the sun in the garden with his magic wand. The sun was hot but it was not burning,

because it was five in the afternoon. The magician hid the sun behind a tree to bring darkness. When the children saw the sun in their garden, they realized how it got there, knowing that their neighbor is the magician of the night. So, they went and asked him to put the sun back in its place in the sky. He said no, as he liked darkness. Just because the sun's rays are thorns, the children could not catch it. So, they left it in their garden until they thought of a way for the sun to return into the sky. But when they went to see it again, the sun was not where they had left it. For ten whole years the two children along with all the other people were looking for the sun. it was not dawn all this time, it was always dark and the babies were crying. Until one day another magician, the magician of the day who loved light, with a magic spell hypnotized the magician of the night and found out that the sun was locked in the storage of a castle in the forest. He released it immediately and raised it to heaven. Now the magician of the night wakes up only when it is dark and the moon is in the sky. But when the sun rises, he immediately falls asleep again.

- 3) Two children visit their godmother's house with their dad. It is September and it is raining. When the rain stops, they go out into the garden to play hide and seek. There they see the rainbow and stop their game to admire it. The two children decide to go near the rainbow to touch it. Without asking anyone, they take the road with the pine trees and reach the forest. The first to meet there are fairies and elves. They tell the children that they will not be able to reach the rainbow but they do not stop because they never give up. On their way they meet a wolf. But they are not afraid, because they have taken the elves with them and they all sing together "My bright moon". But the elves are drowsy and go to their castle to sleep. The two children are left alone in the dark forest and get lost. They are very scared and do not know what to do. Luckily, the fairies are on guard because they have to help them. They bring the day to the forest and send the children two birds, holding in their beaks the map of the forest. The children know how to read the maps because they go to the second grade of Elementary School. So, they quickly find their way out of the forest and meet their godmother and dad who have gone out to look for them. The same night, the two children see in their dream that they are going out in the garden and the rainbow has come there. When touched, it is tender and soft as a cloud.
- 4) It is cloudy. The little girl is playing hide and seek in the garden with her brother. She has been looking for him for half an hour and she cannot find him. He is buried in the grass that has grown a lot. The little girl heads home to rest for a while. Her brother puts the grass aside with his hands and sees her. He yells at the little girl to continue playing. She replies that she is bored when she does not find him. Then, the boy has the idea to play with the ball. As they kick it, the flowers constantly receive strong blows and hurt. They shout for help but the children do not hear them. Once, as the little girl runs to catch the ball, she slips and falls next to a flower. And then, she hears it asking for help. The little girl did not expect this. She runs and tells her brother first. He did not believe her until he bent down and listened to her. The two children call their parents and everyone hears the flowers asking for help. So, they understand that their flowers are magical. Then, the little girl completely by chance says a magic slogan and immediately the fairies who had enchanted the flowers, arrive in the garden. They hold sticks, wear feathers and ordinary clothes. The family thanks them for the magical flowers they gave them and they reply that they will stay in the garden forever.

4.2 Fairy Tales for Mermaids

- 1) When the mermaid first entered the sea, she loved it so much that she only wanted to live there. So, she went and touched a magic seaweed and immediately got a fish tail. She thought of seeking the help of her brother Alexander the Great in order to live at sea forever. He brought her water from the pond located in a dark cave. The Mermaid drank it and became immortal.
- 2) The sea is calm and the sky is clear. A big ship takes people to the island where they want to spend their vacation. It is so beautiful that everyone wishes they could stay there forever. A giant mermaid then arrives on the island to meet her friend, the land giant. Without wanting to, she destroys with her tail the ship that is waiting for the people in the port. So, the people who traveled to the island by ship cannot leave there.
- 3) When ships pass by, mermaids come to the surface and give immortal water to humans without telling them what it is. They think it is plain water and drink it to quench their thirst. When people realize that they have become immortal, they make a drink with gold dust that they take from the sand and in turn they give it to the mermaids they meet, to make them girls and in this way to pay them back for the good they have done for them. So, mermaids can now live with them. But there will always be mermaids because some do not want to be girls.
- 4) The king of the sea gives the mermaid the immortal water and she leaves it on the island where her brother who is a fisherman lives to drink it. But he does not drink it because he does not know that his sister sent it. After a while, another mermaid, who is also the fisherman's sister, finds it and drinks it, and thus she becomes immortal. When the two mermaids find out from the other fishermen that their brother is dead, they find a magic powder in a pearl and wish all the dead to come back to life. This is how their brother comes to life too.

5. Conclusions

From the observation of toddlers during the conduct of the two educational programs, it was found that all sought or more precisely vigorously claimed their participation in the group narrative. Their joy, the enjoyment, the enthusiasm of every toddler who heard his/her classmates turn his/her drawing into a fairy tale was very obvious. The presence of the creator of the drawing increased the willingness of all students to participate in the group narrative. This student emerged as the most important listener. In other words, the classmate, both through his/her drawing and through his/her physical presence, contributed decisively to the process of telling a fairy tale by toddlers. Therefore, each student was definitely present on the specific day that the group narrative unfolded for his/her drawing.

As for the narrative collaboration, it was observed that it was highly developed. Specifically, each toddler took into account the information provided earlier, used it and expanded it. The different views of the toddlers on the people and on the development of the action were put to a vote and in their text the point of view, which most of them chose, was finally recorded. The result of the vote was always respected by all and the narration proceeded accordingly.

As for the content of all the stories of toddlers, there are influences from literary books that they love, as well as references to their favorite heroes. Especially with regard to the mermaids, the influence of Andersen's Little Mermaid is even more evident, and even more so in their drawings of Ariel's figure from the Disney cartoons. Let

us not forget that after 1837, when the work of the great Danish author was published and until today, literary books on mermaids haven't stopped being written, while nowadays there are relevant toys, dolls, costumes and so on, which make the figure of the mermaid particularly familiar to the child population. However, the Greek legend about the immortal water of Alexander the Great, which was accidentally drunk by the mermaid and became immortal, is used in some of the stories of toddlers too.

Magicians and witches, elves and fairies are the narrative characters who play a key role in the development of the plot in the specific texts of toddlers. They create the obstacles that the main hero has to overcome, but they also provide the solution to the dead ends that arise. The magical factor in toddlers' narratives is also associated with the physical world, as various natural elements or creatures are given magical properties. This helps the heroes, if their own characteristics, such as strength or intelligence, prove insufficient to fulfill their weaknesses.

The primary role of the magical element in children's stories, therefore, fully justifies their characterization as fairy tales. After all, as well as the transgression of natural laws occurs in fairy tales, it is the narrative genre that perfectly suits the temperament of toddlers. In other words, fairy tales express the optimism that distinguishes people of infancy and cover their constant need for a happy outcome, for a happy ending, as it is commonly called.

Reference

- Aristotle (349 B. C.). *Ethical Victories*, Vol. B', trans. by K. Zabas, Athens: Euthia.
- Fromm E. (1971). *Escape From Freedom*, trans. by D. Theodorakatos, Athens: Boukoumanis
- Gougoulakis P. (2012). "Social skills, social capital and education", *Science and Society*, Vol. 29, pp. 37–53.
- Grammatas T. (2014). *Theatre in Education: Artistic Expression and Pedagogy*, Athens: Diadrasia.
- Huck C., Hepler S. and Hickman J. (1979). *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Huizinga J. (1989). *Homo Ludens*, trans. by S. Rozakis, G. Lykiardopoulos, Athens: Gnosi.
- Ilia E. and Matsagouras I. (2006). "From game to speech: Production of children's texts through playful activities", in: P. Papoulia-Tzelepi, A. Fterniati, K. Thivaos (Eds.), *Literature Research and Practice in Greek Society*, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, pp. 307–317.
- Kotopoulos T. (2012). "The 'legitimacy' of creative writing", *KEIMENA*, 15, available online at: <http://keimena.ece.uth.gr>.
- Matsagouras I. (2001). *The School Class: Text-centric Approach to Written Speech*, Vol. B', Athens.
- Matsagouras I. and Kouloubaritsi A. (1999). "A syllabus for critical thinking: Theoretical principles and applications in the production of written speech", *Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 299–396.
- Meraklis M. (1986). "The fairy tale and its pedagogical content", *Diadromes*, Vol. 2, pp. 88–90.
- Pascucci M. and Rossi F. (2002). "Not just a scribe", *Gefyres*, Vol. 6, pp. 16–23.
- Poslaniek K. (1992). *To Give Children the Appetite for Reading*, trans. by St. Athini, Athens: Kastaniotis
- Tzaferopoulou M. (1995). "Humor at school: Theory and practice", *Diadromes*, Vol. 40, pp. 318–322.
- Tziovas D. (1987). *After the Aesthetics. Theoretical Tests and Interpretive Readings of Modern Greek Literature*, Athens: Gnosi.
- Venezis I. (2009). *Aeolian Earth*, Athens: Estia.