



Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco
Escola Superior de Educação



Textos, Imagens e Contos sobre Mobilidade

Investigação e Práticas em
Educação Intercultural

Atas do Simpósio,
Castelo Branco

16 e 17 de novembro de 2012

Coordenação de
M. Morgado
M. N. Pires



This project has been carried out with the support of the European Community and the Life Long Learning Programme. The content of this project does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Community, nor does it involve any responsibility on the part of the European Community.

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“The Mouse and his Daughter”: Teaching through Folktales

K. Magos, A. Kontoyianni, P. Arapaki

Resumo — Os contos tradicionais contribuem para o desenvolvimento cognitivo e emocional da criança, constituindo-se como adequados materiais pedagógicos porque fomentam uma aprendizagem em ambiente descontraído e divertido. Os contos tradicionais também podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento da competência de cooperação e empatia da criança, porque a narração e o estudo de um conto na sala de aula pode ser combinada com estratégias de ensino e aprendizagem centradas no aluno, tais como o debate, o trabalho em grupo, as dramatizações, etc. O presente artigo propõe uma oficina de formação pedagógica baseada no conto tradicional “A filha do rato” que se encontra, sob diversas versões, presente em muitas culturas por esse mundo fora. Descrevem-se os objetivos, os participantes, os estádios, as atividades e a avaliação da oficina de formação que contribuiu para que os alunos estreitassem as suas relações com os contos tradicionais, compreendessem de modo mais aprofundado os sentidos de um conto tradicional específico e desenvolvessem competências interculturais.

Abstract — Folktales contribute to both cognitive and emotional development of children and are very effective as an educational material because they combine teaching and learning with relaxation and entertainment. Folktales can also contribute to the development of children’s cooperation, competence, and empathy, because narrating and studying a story in the school class can be combined with student-centered teaching and learning techniques, such as discussion, work in groups, role games etc. This article presents an educational workshop based on the folktale “The mouse and his daughter”, which can be found, in different variants, in many countries worldwide. The aim, the participants, the stages, the activities and the evaluation of the workshop are described in the article thoroughly. The workshop helped the students to warm up their relation with folktales, to understand deeper the meanings of the specific folktale and to develop intercultural competences.

Palavras-chave — Art, Drama, Folk tale, Education, Workshop.



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1 THE ROLE OF FOLKTALES IN EDUCATION

The list of books, articles and researches that have been written worldwide concerning the educational use of folktales, especially for younger children, is really long and it is aged more than a century. Folktales contribute to both cognitive and emotional development of children and are very effective as an educational material because they combine teaching and learning with relaxation and entertainment.

Well-known worldwide researchers support that folktales help the child to come of age normally as well as to form a healthy personality (Bettelheim, 1976, Zipes, 1997). Folktales are an appropriate guide, in order for the child to be admitted to the world of adults. By reading or listening to folktales, children come to grips with adulthood situations. They learn to recognize and deal with their fears and gain the equipment to face possible reversals in their lives. By identifying themselves with folktales' heroes or by rejecting some of them, children can form their personality, formulate their criteria for choosing friends and also develop empathy.

Along with emotional development, the contribution of folktales to children's both cognitive and linguistic development is remarkable (Rodari, 1981, Santagostino, 1997). Through folktales, children can gain knowledge and skills in many and different fields, enrich their vocabulary, and practice oral and written expression. Through folktales children can also develop their imagination, as this imaginary world motivates them to participate with their own ideas and suggestions. Developing children's critical ability constitutes one additional reason to use folktales in education. Each folktale hides one or more problems, each one of which has one or more solutions. By reading the folktale and by trying to imagine the story's continuation, children can think about the problem and work out a solution. They are able to judge heroes' actions and agree or disagree with their choices. Finally and depending on folktales' endings, the child is able to find out whether heroes' actions, as much as his/her own thoughts about them, were right or wrong. The feedback offered by folktales can thus help children to understand and evaluate right and wrong solutions, which reflect real situations, even if they have been given within imaginary stories.

Folktales can also contribute to the development of children's cooperation competence and interaction, as narrating and studying a story in the school class can be combined with student-centered teaching and learning techniques, such as discussion, work in groups, role games etc. Through those techniques children have the ability to cooperate with each other, exchange ideas and plan common team activities. This procedure is the most appropriate context in order for the intercultural communication and interaction among children to take place. It creates a comfortable and relaxing educational environment, where children are not afraid to share their experiences. Children, through folktales, can find similarities and differences among their cultures, express themselves in their mother tongues and express their otherness without being afraid of possible rejection.

This otherness, through its variable dimensions, is a common and very important element of many folktales. Different forms of otherness usually characterize the main character's identity, as well as that of the other heroes of the folktale. The king's son who dresses like a shepherd and leaves the palace, the old woman who is also a witch, the princess who keeps sleeping, the foreigner who comes out of nowhere, are common folktale heroes who represent the "other".

By approaching otherness using folktales' heroes and by talking about it, children gradually familiarize with it, when at the same time they understand that it is an element that, one way or another, characterizes humanity as a whole. Thus, as time goes by, they feel comfortable to discuss their or other children's otherness, without inhibitions. Furthermore, they can resist to stereotypes, prejudices and attitudes which lead to the exclusion of those who do not belong to the dominant group (Magos, 2009).

2 THE FOLKTALE: THE MOUSE AND HIS DAUGHTER

There was once a mouse that had the most beautiful daughter in the world and he was concerned because he didn't want to marry his daughter to just another mouse. One day, while he was thinking who would be the best bridegroom for his daughter, he noticed the brightness of the sun! He thought that it was a very good idea to marry his daughter to the sun. So, without wasting any time he took his daughter and went to the sun's big palace.

There he said:

– Sun, you are the only one I want to marry my daughter to. Both of you are so beautiful! Would you like that?

But the sun answered:

– Oh! I don't think I'm as beautiful and powerful as you think I am. The clouds often cover me and I get dark and I can't help it. Why don't you go and make this proposition to them? Maybe they will accept it.

After that, the poor mouse was so desperate that he went to the clouds. But even the clouds didn't fancy marrying her either. So, they told him:

– Mr. Mouse can't you see that we are not that powerful? When the wind blows we shatter and he destroys us. So, why don't you go to him?

The mouse took his daughter and went to the wind and told him the purpose of his visit. But the wind answered that he would marry his daughter with great pleasure, but that there was a tower standing there that was more powerful than him. It had stayed intact for 40 years. So, the mouse couldn't do anything else but go and ask this tower if he wanted to marry his daughter.

– Dear Mouse, said the tower, – Can you hear the noise inside my walls? What do you think it is? They are brave mice who ruin me little by little and they are not afraid of destroying me. That's why mice are the most powerful creatures of the world.

After all that the mouse understood that the best bridegroom for his daughter was a mouse. And so it happened! His daughter got married to a brave and beautiful mouse and both of them were happy for the rest of their lives.

3 REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE FOLKTALE

The choice of the folktale "The mouse and his daughter" was made for four main reasons: First and foremost, this folktale can be found, in different variants, in many countries worldwide. Especially in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, this specific folktale is one of the most widespread. Given the multicultural character of school classes, choosing a folktale connected to children's cultural background is of great importance in order for the intercultural communication and interaction to be promoted.

A second reason is that this folktale can be a suitable base for discussion or approach to the numerous and different dimensions of the dipole "self" and "the other". The reflection concerning the function of the dipole above, on an individual or social level, can lead to a reflection and discussion concerning general questions about identity and otherness. Reflection and discussion around these topics can promote the development of intercultural interaction.

The third reason is that the folktale "The mouse and his daughter" has all the basic characteristics of a chain folktale, where the end of a scene constitutes the starting point of another. In this folktale, the main hero's meeting with each one of the secondary heroes leads to the search of the next scene, a procedure that reveals itself step by step until the story ends. Understanding and exercising according to the structure above, which is common in a large number of folktales worldwide, contributes to a more effective approach, as far as folktales are concerned.

Finally, one more reason for which this folktale has been chosen is that its content is approachable through various art activities, which contribute to a better understanding and elaboration of the numerous and different questions that are placed in this folktale in a direct or indirect way. The combination of narrating a folktale and taking part in different activities concerning its theme is a teaching approach that contributes effectively to the wider educational exploitation of folktales.

4 AN EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP BASED ON THE FOLKTALE

The workshop took place at the fifth grade of the Primary School of Platamonas in Hemathia, Greece, in the context of the program "We Speak the Same Culture" (CAFT, 2007). This is a Comenius European Program in which the following countries participated: Greece (University of Thessaly), Estonia (University of Tartu), Slovenia (University of Ljubljana) and Turkey (Gazi University). The main aim of this Program was a comparative study of folktales of the countries above in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences among their cultures. The development of the participants' intercultural competence was another aim of the Program (CAFT, 2009).

The Primary school of Platamonas was chosen as the workshop place because it constitutes a typical case of Primary School in a Greek small provincial city, which had the appropriate place for this kind of activities.

This school has six grades, and the fifth grade, where the workshop took place, had at that period of time 20 pupils, of Greek and Albanian origin. The workshop lasted one school day, which corresponded to five school hours. Apart from the class pupils, in the workshop participated the

animator, who was a teacher with a Master degree in Education. Furthermore, in the workshop there were three observers, whose task was to evaluate it. One of them was the class teacher and the other two were University teachers specialized in Drama and Arts Education.

4.1 The aim of the workshop

The main aim of the workshop was to motivate pupils in order for them to:

- Meet or warm up their relation with folktales.
- Recognize ways of connecting folk tradition with their everyday lives.
- Express ways and feelings through oral, written and art activities.
- Seek ways of intercultural communication and interaction.
- Approach the specific folktale from many stand points.
- Reflect on important personal and social issues existing in the specific folktale.
- Understand folktales' value as a pleasant and interesting educational material.

Given that most of the pupils today are not as familiarized with folktales as those of past times, while some of them haven't even heard of them, the exploitation of such a story in the curricular context is an effective way of acquaintance and contact between children and the world of folktales. By studying folktales, children can seek the lost thread that connects folk tradition with their everyday life, by recognizing common reflections, facts, as well as scenery. At the same time, reflections concerning questions common for all people, which are posed to folktales, help pupils, no matter where they come from, to express their opinions and experiences in many ways, to think about important personal and social matters, to search for new ways of communicating and interaction with people around them. Through this procedure children are, finally, capable of recognizing the value, as well as the power of folktales as a literary as much as a pleasant and interesting educational material. The recognition of folktale value by pupils can gradually lead to the change of their general attitude towards folktales. In this way, carrying out a workshop with the aims presented above can contribute to the replacement of indifference or rejection usually shown by pupils when it comes to folktales, with a positive attitude characterized by acceptance and interest.

4.2 The stages of the workshop

The workshop was developed in the following five stages:

4.2.1 First stage: Framing the workshop using a TV show

Before referring to the folktale, the animator suggested that pupils should plan and play a children's TV show in the class, in the form of an educational drama. After they agreed, they were asked to find the title, the show's audiovisual signal, as well as to make suggestions concerning its content. Although pupils didn't suggest anything having to do with the folktale, they didn't reject the animator's proposal to make a show which would have a folktale as theme. Thus, some pupils were the journalist-presenters, the rest were the audience, while the animator became the guest, who would narrate a folktale.

The framing of the workshop through the form of a TV show motivated children to be interested and participate, something that might not have happened if they had been asked just to listen to a folktale. Most of the pupils aren't usually that related to folktales as they are to television shows. Framing the workshop using the form of a TV show would reduce their possible objections concerning dealing with a folktale narration and talking about it.

In addition to these, the educational drama, which is a main method in order for a framing like this to take place, is an attractive procedure that highly motivates children, as teaching and learning becomes experiential and turns to social and emotional educational procedure by relating at the same time to their feelings and the others.

The multi-dimension significance of drama in education is highlighted through research conducted by theoretical and practical researchers. It is a dynamic and cooperative way of exploring the world through drama activities, roles and theatrical situations (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1987). By opening personal experiences for exploration or by starting a scenario, folktale or story and moving to personal experience, pupils make stories of which they can be a part (Kempe, 1996). In this way, every folktale or every part of the lesson is connected to the pupil's personality and experience and stops being just a subject in which s/he will be examined. Through

the interaction of ideas and actions, codes and attitudes are examined and can directly be revised, something that cannot happen in real life (Heathcote, 1985).

4.2.2 Second stage: Folktale narration

The animator, being the guest narrator in the show, narrated the folktale. The narration was made in a direct, experiential speech and by using local geography and tradition elements, which motivated pupils' interest and active listening. In order for pupils' high correspondence to be succeeded, the animator used offhand puppets to represent the main characters and thus combined narration with puppet show. The combination of narrating with other ways of art expression, such as music, drama or puppets is a common way for many narrators. Moreover, it has been proved that a combination like that multiplies pupils' interest and correspondence, especially when used for educational purposes.

4.2.3 Third stage: Discussion

Folktale narration was followed by discussion, which, in the context of the TV show, took place among journalists, audience and the narrator. It focused on the folktale's most important points, as well as on the annotation of a show on the theme of folktales. Thus, the main points approached during this discussion were the following:

- Having power and the being "powerful".
- Self-esteem and acceptance of oneself.
- Relationship with the different "other".
- The procedure of choosing companion now and then, here and elsewhere.
- Women's position now and then, here and elsewhere.
- Diversity in family.
- The role of the Media in forming attitudes towards "other".
- TV-shows for children and criteria for their evaluation.

Obviously, this discussion has just touched on the points above, and in this way gave the opportunity to pupil-journalists and pupil-audience to express some first thoughts, being the trigger for a deeper reflection that would follow in the context of everyday school activities. It functioned as a starting point in order for the pupils and the class teacher, who watched the procedure, to choose which of these topics they would like to work on and in what way, in articulation with the curriculum. It is worth mentioning that, during the discussion, the animator, although maintaining her role as the guest narrator, presented her own point of view as well, while helping, when necessary, to coordinate conversation, which was actually a duty taken on by pupil-journalists.

4.2.4 Fourth stage: Expression, communication and interaction through different art activities

Maintaining the context of the TV show, the discussion was followed by a series of art activities, which had multi-dimensional expression, communication and exchange among pupils as its main goal. The animator was responsible for the implementation of activities and its coordination, by maintaining at the same time her role as the guest narrator in the TV show. Three of those activities are thoroughly described below:

Interview with the folktale heroes

When using educational drama, some pupils impersonate folktale heroes, while others become journalists interviewing the first ones. The interview technique is very attractive to pupils, while at the same time it helps them to understand the heroes' points of view in a better way and to search for the possible reasons concerning heroes' attitudes. Through interviewing, pupils had the opportunity to re-express views concerning the folktale's basic points, which were affected, apparently, from the conversation done in the previous stage. Apart from the drama technique, an alternative way of exploiting the interview would be for the pupils, in groups or individually, to think and write interviews with a folktale hero. This way may not be as direct as educational drama, but it helps to improve pupils' writing competence.

Illustrating the folktale

The main aim of this art activity was for pupils: 1) to develop cooperation among them through their participation in the folktale's illustration; 2) to develop the dialogue among them, in order to decide which visual elements they'd choose for the chosen scene; 3) to express themselves in a creative

way, using visual material; and 4) to exchange personal experiences through illustrating the folktale.

We assumed that, through visual presentation of the folktale's heroes and by illustrating the basic places in which they acted, pupils could deeply understand not only the heroes' characters and the folktale's content, but also the possible different issues that were directly or indirectly touched on in this folktale. It was also expected that, in the end, they would express their feelings through visual art expression (the usage of color materials and their design lines) in their effort to cooperate in groups.

In this activity, pupils discovered and described the folktale's main characters, defined the basic characteristics of their figures and created figures using the relief synthetic method of collage with the masque technique. Then, they defined the main different scenes/ pictures of the folktale. They analyzed each picture in order to agree and know, as a team, what they would paint, in which part of the first level they would compose it and with which color shades. They worked in groups of five, and each group undertook the illustration of a different scene, using big markers. In the end, the illustrated children's works were the subject of an exhibition for which the pupils-artists in the school of Platamonas were responsible.

Creation of a drama activity

This specific folktale, as almost every folktale, is suitable for theatrical activities. The happening chosen to be presented in the context of the workshop was a wedding feast. Weddings are celebrated in a special way in every culture. This is why their theatrical representation is an occasion for exchanging cultural references, codes and traditions among pupils. The wedding procedure, as well as that of the feast that follows, gives pupils the opportunity to find similarities and differences among their cultures. Moreover, the wedding theme is appropriate for a project approach, as pupils can familiarize with its different dimensions in the context of different subjects of the curriculum. In this specific workshop, apart from discussing the wedding ceremony in different countries and regions, pupils firstly designed and made wedding costumes using cartons, fabrics and waste materials and then they chose songs for the wedding feast, which they finally presented as a theatrical activity. The animator's role was determining for the coordination and completion of the procedure. She wasn't instructing pupils, but helping the discussion process, the constructions and the design of the whole activity.

4.2.5 Fifth stage: Evaluation of the workshop

The workshop was evaluated by the pupils who took part in it, by the animator, as well as by three non-participant observers. The pupils' evaluation was made while maintaining at the same time the TV show context. After the workshop was completed and since its completion was the end of the show, pupils sent a letter to the alleged television channel, writing their opinion about this specific TV show. In their letters they refer to the emotions caused by the show, to the possible knowledge they gained, the points they liked the most, as well as those they would prefer to change in a next show. These letters are an indirect form of evaluating the workshop, as they demonstrate its strong and weak points, according to pupils' opinions, its most attractive points, as well as those that didn't correspond to its primary goals.

The animator's evaluation, of the participating observation type, focused on the changes that had to be done during the workshop in relation to the primary plan, while following at the same time children's needs and interests. Furthermore, she pinpointed the difficulties she faced, one of which was that of the pressure of time, her role as animator as well as the perceptions and attitudes of the pupils who participated in the workshop.

The class teacher's evaluation, who knew pupils very well, gave important information concerning the way in which the workshop affected specific pupils, cognitively and emotionally, as well as the way in which it affected pupils' relationships. The other two observers, who didn't know the pupils and therefore hadn't experienced any emotional bond with them, could objectively evaluate the workshop, having as a main criterion the success or not of its primary goals.

5 CONCLUSIONS

As the workshop evaluation proved, the workshop's primary goals were more or less achieved. Pupils were familiarized in a pleasant and creative way with a typical traditional folktale, a fact that could be a motive for further research, reading or listening to such folktales. The positive emotions described by the pupils in the workshop evaluation texts are the context in which a positive attitude towards folktales can be created. This attitude changes former negative attitudes of pupils concerning that specific type of literature.

Framing the folktale with the form of a children's TV show, in combination with the variety of activities used in it, helped pupils to recognize ways of connecting folktales to their everyday life. In this way, pupils understood that folktales aren't relevant to old times only, but also have timeless meanings, which can be connected to problems, needs and values of each and every period of time.

During the discussion following the folktale narration pupils had the opportunity to exchange opinions concerning different issues, such as the relationship and communication among different people, the characteristics that define otherness and the way of dealing with them in time and space, the "powerful" characterization, and criteria that define it in different social and cultural context. It is obvious that the conversation concerning the issues above, given the multicultural variety of the class, helped pupils to search for and find ways of intercultural communication and interaction. Intercultural communication was also promoted through pupils' working groups in the context of the workshop creative activities. The benefits of using groups in teaching and learning process have been appreciated for decades, while its contribution to intercultural sensitization and communication of pupils is one more of its positive characteristics.

Creative activities that took place during the workshop gave pupils the opportunity to feel free to express their opinions, not only through speech, but also through painting, constructions, theater, music, puppet show and movement. In this way, communication among pupils wasn't based only on oral language, but took at the same time advantage of other ways of expression. All these ways, which are especially effective for pupils speaking different mother tongues and having difficulties in using the Greek language, contributed to the creation of a cooperation and communication environment. At the same time, the combination of artistic expression and cognitive approach, as this developed during the discussion and the activities, brought to the surface the benefits of using different curriculum subjects to the educational use of folktales (Arapaki & Kontoyianni 2006).

Finally, through the whole workshop procedure, pupil-participants seem to fully grasp that folktales aren't just a pleasant type of literature, but also an interesting educational material. The appropriate use of folktales in the context of the curriculum can enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning procedure. By paraphrasing the famous Chinese proverb, we could warmly support that "A folktale is equal to one thousand lessons"!

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