

# The Transmission of Ideas and Values Through the Use of Literature in School: Indicative Cases With Toddlers

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The indisputable pedagogical power of literature, since it evokes experiences as a consequence of the creative role of the reader, constitutes a valuable ally of the teacher. In literary texts, persons are carriers of ideas and values. As we identify with them, we capture their ideas and values in the most effective way. Especially for younger readers, who find it difficult to understand abstract concepts, this mode of transmission could be considered ideal, provided that a didactic approach is chosen that will allow students to express their reading impressions from contact with texts. Thus, special characteristics of each student-reader will emerge, as well as new elements of the literary work itself, which is inexhaustible. Regarding the transmission of ideas and values in Nursery School through literature, we cite two cases. The first seeks to raise the awareness of toddlers about the right of every child to grow up carefree and safe in a family environment. The text chosen to achieve the above goal is *The Little Match Girl* by Andersen. Stimulated by the emblematic, timeless heroine, who tries to warm herself by lighting her matches one by one, toddlers create original narrative texts, looking for a family for her. They present her observing the people around her and dreaming of a family life near them. In the second case, in order for students to realize the importance of the natural world for man, the content and accuracy of an easily understood passage from the work *Report to Greco*, by Kazantzakis, is used in teaching. Toddlers who are asked to retell the passage in the classroom replace themselves with the student asking for a break in order to enjoy better a bird singing. Thus, they consolidate the essential relationship with nature, which, as the author's experience, arises from the whole of his work.

*Keywords:* Literary texts, toddlers-readers, family, nature

## Introduction

The indisputable pedagogical power of literature, which is known and utilized since antiquity is still systematically used in education (Tompkins, 1988), lies in its ability to provoke experiences. In responding to the role that the author has defined in each work for the reader, various perceptual processes occur. This is a very creative process (Iser, 1990), which leads to the direct reading involvement in the narrative case, to the identification with the heroes (Booth, 1987).

As those literary heroes are carriers of ideas and values, the reader identifies with them and takes the ideas and values that characterize them in the most effective way. Especially for younger readers, who are unable to perceive abstract concepts on their own, the specific way of transmitting fundamental ideas and values of our culture could certainly be considered irreplaceable. Therefore, aiming at the effectiveness of the educational process, the use of literature will be the most valuable ally.

In order to achieve the goal of education by utilizing literature, a didactic approach will be chosen that will allow students to express their reading impressions from the contact with the text. In this paper, through two literary works starring children-heroes, ideas and values that are directly related to childhood are presented.

### **Implementation Elements**

The specific educational programs that utilize literary texts for the transmission of ideas and values to toddlers took place in a public Nursery School in Attica. The first program was implemented in 2015-2016, with a group of 18 toddlers during the mandatory schedule. Of the participating toddlers, 15 were five years old. Of these, six were attending for the second year. The three four-year-olds in the classroom were all boys.

On the contrary, the second educational program took place exclusively during the optional hours of the Nursery School, from one to four p.m., the year 2016-2017. Thirteen toddlers and three preschoolers participated in this.

### **Objectives—Aspirations**

- The thinking and awareness on the part of toddlers about ideas and values that are presented during the reading/teaching of literary texts, and their connection with real life.
- The cultivation of toddlers' critical ability and the ability to choose based on specific criteria and to support their choice with arguments.
- The development of creative thinking, narrative expression, as well as familiarity with the literary phenomenon and the cultivation of love of reading.
- Enhancing the willingness to collaborate between classmates and their effectiveness in collaboration.
- Understanding the connection between oral and written speech, the quality of written speech to represent the spoken word.

### **Methodology of the Educational Programs**

The students seek to express in their entirety with enthusiasm the emotional charge caused by the text, through their participation in educational literary programs. The specific programs unfold as a game (Poslaniek, 1992), in full correspondence with the playful mood that characterizes childhood (Huizinga, 1989). As part of this process, toddlers express their identification with the narrative characters and focus on the narrative scene that has fascinated them. Thus, they discover and share their special characteristics but also contribute as readers to the emergence of new elements of the literary work itself, which is by nature inexhaustible (Tziovas, 1987).

Toddlers shape the development of action, choosing to creatively imitate the literary model or modify or even overturn it, according to the teaching principle of declining guidance (Matsagouras, 2001), answering the teacher's questions (Pascucci & Rossi, 2002), in groups or individually (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1979). The precise recording by the teacher of the speech produced by toddlers, focusing on the work of literature, is then utilized as a theatrical event, a fact that constitutes a further motivation for free and creative expression (Iliá & Matsagouras, 2006).

### **Teaching Material**

#### **The Little Match Girl, by Andersen**

The work was first published in 1845 and is one of the most popular works of literature in the world.

According to its narrative case, a little girl who tries to sell matches on New Year's Eve to passers-by, in her desperate attempt to warm up, lights her matches one by one and dreams. In her imagination, she acquires and enjoys everything that she lacks in reality: the warmth, the festive dinner, the festive home environment (Andersen, 2005).

This text was the focus of a social awareness educational program entitled "A Family for the Little Girl". The program was designed and implemented in order for toddlers to realize the value of the family, to emerge and consolidate by themselves the need, the desire, the right of every child to develop in a family environment.

### **Report to Greco, by Kazantzakis**

From this work, a short excerpt is selected, in which a little boy appears one spring day to ask the teacher to interrupt the lesson in order to enjoy the undisturbed singing of a bird with his classmates. The work is characterized as autobiographical, as is the case for all of the Kazantzakis' novels, since all his heroes have elements of his own personality (Zografou, 1977).

The passage read to toddlers is as follows:

One day, it was spring, God's joy, the windows were open and the smell of a blossoming mandarin entered from the opposite house. Our minds had also become a flowering mandarin and we could no longer hear about accent marks and tildes. And just about a bird had sat on the plane tree in the school yard and was singing. Then a student, pale, red-haired, who had come this year from the village, his name was Nikolios, didn't stand but raised his finger: "Be quiet, teacher, he shouted. Be quiet, teacher, let's listen to the bird!" (Kazantzakis, 2015)

From this passage emerges the position that the role of nature, as a field of education and self-knowledge of human existence, is unique and irreplaceable. The content and accuracy of the passage, but also the fact that it is easily understood by toddlers, allows its use for the acquaintance with the natural world, for their awareness of the need for contact with nature, in order for the individual to develop smoothly, for their awareness of its primary role in their lives.

## **Presentation of Activities and Results**

### **The Educational Program "A Family for the Little Girl"**

With the stimuli of the emblematic, timeless heroine of Andersen, we begin a relaxed discussion about the reasons why it is appropriate for every young child to grow up in a family. Then, varied family models that we encounter in modern times are presented to toddlers. Specifically, through seven different types of families from modern Greek literature (Iliia, 2012), toddlers are asked to choose the most appropriate for the Little Girl according to their opinion. Those toddlers who choose the same family, constitute a subgroup that will collectively narrate the life of the Little Girl within this family. Each narrative will then be illustrated by all students. The narratives evolve into events, from which the open theatrical Christmas performance of the Nursery School will emerge.

The following are four of the relevant stories of toddlers:

- Three little sisters pass by on the street. They go to their dad's shop, which sells sportswear and shoes. The Little Girl lights another match and dreams that these girls are also her little sisters. They all live together in the same room. They have their breakfast and plan the games of the day. Because the weather is very cold, they decide not to go out for a game. They remember that the last time they played in the cold, they got sick. So,

they suggest playing with their playdough. They will make ice cream, pizza, and cookies from playdough. In the afternoon, they will drive to dad's shop to help. They will take him whatever they make, to treat the children of the customers.

- In the illuminated shopping street there is a shop with computers, tablets, and mobile phones. Two twin boys enter. They pass in front of the Little Girl without noticing her, because they both look at their screens. The Little Girl tells them: "Please take matches". But they do not hear it. They are absorbed in the video games they play. When the two boys pass, the Little Girl quickly lights another match. In its flame she dreams that she is playing with them. She holds in her hands a brand new tablet. She is excited. When night falls, they put their tablets to charge and all three look at the sky together. They talk about the moon and the stars. Their parents are currently working in their restaurant. During the day they study new recipes on their own tablets. When the match goes out, another dream is lost for the Little Girl.

- A beautiful lady comes out of the flower shop, loaded with a hug of flowers and enters next to the crystal shop, which is hers. As she passes in front of the Little Girl, she smiles at her. How sweet is her smile! The Little Girl lights a match and dreams that she lives near her. They have a huge garden, with many different flowers and they take care of them every afternoon, when the Little Girl returns from school and her mother returns from her shop. Mum promises her Little Girl that she will throw her a birthday party, where she will invite all her friends from school, to try her food and a huge cake. But even this beautiful dream ends for the Little Girl, when her match goes out.

- A girl passes with her parents in front of the Little Match Girl. They stop in the shop windows and look at things. They talk about Christmas holidays. The Little Girl lights another match and sees that they are playing with the other girl with water guns in an indoor hotel pool. Because it had showed a lot, they think they do not need any more toys. They make snowballs and throw them at each other. They also make snowmen instead of dolls. Then the match goes out and with it this dream ends too.

### **The Educational Program "Be Quiet, Teacher"**

During the implementation of the program we first isolate the phrase "Be quiet, teacher!" and we ask the students to guess who says it, to whom, and what for. With this specific manipulation we seek to offer a stimulus, which will excite the curiosity of toddlers, will trouble them so that when reading of the excerpt of Kazantzakis follows, where their question will be answered, they will watch it with special interest and attention. Additionally, in this way, reading the following passage is a surprise, since the children's assumptions and expectations are frustrated (Riffaterre, 1988). As a result of the surprise, the reading interest in the text peaks.

After reading the passage, toddlers are called upon to retell them, replacing nine-year-old Nikolio with themselves. Each toddler participating in the program presents himself in the position of the student who refers to the bird, addressed to the teacher. All toddlers narrate the same scene, with variations from the literary model and protagonists themselves. Out of the 16 narratives of toddlers, we quote four, which have been collected by the technique of random sampling:

- One day when the teacher was teaching us additions, I raised my hand and told him: "Sir, would you like us to hear the bird?" He replied: "No. I'm bored of birds. I do not like them at all. I only like them when we kill and eat them". Then, all the children shouted: "Please, teacher, please". The teacher said: "No, no children, we will only do additions." Then I said to him again: "But sir, this is a melody". And all the children gathered at

the window, to listen to this melody. The bird was chirping, so that the other birds could go near it and sing together. The birds and the bird teacher gathered and started singing to us all together. And our teacher grimaced and said: "Okay then, since you are all asking me, let's take a break". Then he said: "I finally like the birds". And every day, at the same day, the twenty birds come with their teacher and sing us their melodies.

- Our teacher told us stories about people of the past. I did not want to hear, because people of the past did bad things with guns. Whenever the teacher tells us these stories, I prefer to draw and write. I raised my hand and said, "Can you stop telling stories about people of the past?" And he did not continue. And when the teacher stopped, we heard the bird chirping. And the teacher said then: "I really like this bird that is chirping". And we all said together: "We like to hear it too". And then we asked the teacher: "Should we paint this bird?" And he answered "Yes". The teacher then wrote the sentence "The bird is chirping" so that we can learn to write it too.

- The teacher shouts, because instead of us taking the books to read, we take the markers to draw. Then, I say to him: "Be quiet, teacher, let's listen to the bird!" The teacher stops shouting. We finish our drawings and then we get our books. We had the idea to paint, because when we paint, everyone is quiet in the classroom. And then we hear the birds chirping.

- Once I raised my hand and the teacher told me to stop so that he would not bitch slap me. I then told him to be a little calmer, because he kept shouting. He was yelling at us, because he was not sleeping well. He watched TV for a long time and lay down very late at night. He was watching crime films. When he finally fell asleep, he had dreams with thieves who had run away. Now, every day at our school we hear a bird chirping. Our teacher holds this bird in his hands. The teacher has become kind and nice, he helps people and he is calm, because his life now that he lives with the bird has changed. He sleeps as soon as it gets dark and is no longer late in front of the TV.

### **Evaluation**

All toddlers participated with absolute success in the activities, focusing their interest on the two main children's literary figures of Andersen and Kazantzakis. Toddlers are completely identified with both the Little Girl and the student in Kazantzakis's work, who considered the bird singing more interesting than the teacher's lesson. The universal enthusiasm of toddlers remained undiminished throughout the duration of the programs.

The inexhaustible imagination of children created original narratives, all completely different from each other. Several toddlers' references were used creatively in subsequent stories by their classmates. This fact, as well as the correspondence of the narratives with their illustrations, proves the development of toddlers' ability in listening and communication. Collaboration between toddlers also emerges from the coherent narratives of the subgroups.

After toddlers' divinations had preceded and Easter holidays had elapsed, on their way back to school toddlers eagerly asked when the text would be read, to see if they had guessed correctly. When the passage was read, toddlers listened to it very carefully. Hearing that the reason the student in the text asked his teacher to stop was to enjoy the bird singing, they were obviously surprised. The universal excitement was due to the fact that during the children's storytelling in the context of the program, birds were constantly chirping from the school yard. Thus, the individual narrative of each toddler unfolded in a very calm, almost all-encompassing environment.

For the toddlers sensitized by Kazantzakis' work, this chirping was their direct and personal

communication with the birds. They even tried to interpret the chanting, stating that the birds showed their joy. They often went through the process of identifying the cause of this joy. Someone assumed that a bird was giving birth. Another attributed this joy to the fact that the birds were near him. A third thought the birds were happy with what the children were learning at school.

As can be seen from the presentation of the results, all the objectives were fully achieved. In particular, both individual and group toddler narratives are distinguished for their uniqueness and originality. Their plot is interesting and the characters are reflected in them clearly. But what mainly emerges as a conclusion from the implementation of the programs is the effectiveness of the transmission of ideas and values, arising from the two specific literary works, to toddlers.

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