

Fairy tales in the classroom: perspectives of teachers working in early childhood education ^{1 2 3}

Contos de fadas na sala de aula: perspectivas de professoras atuantes na Educação Infantil

Cuentos de hadas en el aula: perspectivas de los profesores que trabajan en la educación infantil

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Abstract

This article analyzes the perceptions of early childhood education teachers about working with fairy tales in the classroom. It is based on qualitative research, developed through a bibliographic and ethnographic study, with observations of classes and interviews with two teachers who conduct classes for children between 3 and 5 years old. The results indicate that the teachers' views about childhood, fairy tales, and the role of literature in children's education influence how the work is developed, including the mediation made during the reading of the stories. This is seen as a practice rich in learning for children, but also permeated with challenges related to the planning/execution of activities and how the school institution and its actors give meaning to these experiences.

Keywords: Fairy tale, Childhood, Literature, Child education, Mediation

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Resumo

Este artigo analisa percepções de professoras da Educação Infantil sobre o trabalho com contos de fadas em sala de aula. Baseia-se em pesquisa qualitativa, desenvolvida por meio de estudo bibliográfico e etnográfico, com observações de aulas e entrevistas com duas professoras regentes de turmas de crianças entre 3 e 5 anos. Os resultados indicam que a visão que as professoras possuem sobre infância, contos de fadas e o papel da literatura na formação das crianças influencia a forma como o trabalho é desenvolvido, inclusive a mediação feita durante a leitura das histórias. Esta é vista como uma prática rica em aprendizados para as crianças, mas também permeada de desafios relacionados ao planejamento e à execução das atividades e à forma como a instituição escolar e seus atores significam essas experiências.

Palavras-chave: *Contos de Fadas, Infância, Literatura, Educação Infantil, Mediação*

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las percepciones de los profesores de jardín de infancia sobre el trabajo con cuentos de hadas en el aula. Se basa en una investigación cualitativa, desarrollada a través de un estudio bibliográfico y etnográfico, con observaciones de clases y entrevistas con dos docentes que dirigen clases de niños entre 3 y 5 años. Los resultados indican que la visión que tienen los docentes sobre la infancia, los cuentos de hadas y el papel de la literatura en la educación de los niños influye en la forma en que se desarrolla el trabajo, incluida la mediación que se realiza durante la lectura de los cuentos. Esta es vista como una práctica rica en aprendizajes para los niños, pero también impregnada de desafíos relacionados con la planificación / ejecución de actividades y la forma en que la institución escolar y sus actores dan sentido a estas experiencias.

Palabras clave: *Cuentos de hadas, Infancia, Literatura, Educación Infantil, Mediación*

Introduction

In our society, access to literature plays a vital role in the formation of human beings as individuals and social subjects. This access tends to pave the way for different repercussions and reactions - which can affect cognition and also the socio-affective dimension - and thus provides the experience of emotions and the development of imaginative language. Literature has the power to develop specific emotional structures for their inner needs. This is because when we identify with a story, with the theme addressed there, and/or with the characters who lead it, it becomes a reference for formulating judgments, experiences, and particular

characteristics. Thus, besides reading and decoding, contact with literature provides important resources in searching for meaning and identification (Hillesheim & Guareschi, 2006).

Fairy tales, in particular, become allies in educating children and young people about their constitution as people, subjects of knowledge, and co-participants in constructing the society where they are inserted. This type of literature makes an important link between the real and the imaginary and fosters the construction of critical thinking. The mediation between children and stories, made by teachers, can close multiple educational possibilities and assist in constructing meaningful experiences and learning while providing moments of discovery, enjoyment, and reflection.

Several studies conducted in recent decades attest to these possibilities of working with children, which is the focus of this article. The study by Capellini et al. (2012) recognizes the contribution of fairy tales to child development, presents the tales as an educational resource in the schooling process of students with intellectual disabilities, and highlights the mediation work that the teacher can do. The authors state that fairy tales, as a literary activity, stimulate “the development of the children’s identity because they experience another way of being and thinking, expand their conceptions about things and people when they play various social roles in the act of representing various characters” (p. 170).

The research of Maia et al. (2011) also reveals the importance of the literature for children’s formation. The authors conducted a study with teachers who work in preschool with children aged 2 to 6 years old and point out the role played by the children’s book as a didactic-methodological resource - they problematize its use as well as the mediation made from it.

Other studies (Augustini, 2015; Camargo, 2011; Marcelo, 2012) highlight, based on findings obtained from the investigation of different realities, that teachers can extract rich possibilities for their work with the appreciation of fairy tales. Some of these studies illustrate the importance of knowledge, by education professionals, of the influences that tales can exert on the construction of children’s identity and their development.

Considering the contributions of these and other studies already conducted on the subject, this article seeks to advance existing scientific production. Therefore, we start by analyzing the reality experienced by teachers who work in Early Childhood Education in public

schools in the city of Erechim, Rio Grande do Sul. The study⁴ sought to investigate, more specifically, how professionals who work in this context mean working with tales, with what objectives this work is done, methodological approaches and privileged activities, and how children receive them. The comparison of the findings obtained in the research with the revised scientific literature made it possible to develop a discussion about the educational possibilities of working with fairy tales in the context of Early Childhood Education, the repercussions of this work in the process of development, and learning of students and the challenges involved.

The article's organization includes this introduction, followed by a section dedicated to the theoretical-conceptual discussion on fairy tales and another to the analysis of the results obtained with the empirical research conducted. The article concludes with some final remarks.

Fairy tales: importance and educational possibilities

Storytelling is an art of many centuries. In this sense, children's literature - for intertwining different aspects, the real with the imaginary, dreams and reality - puts children in contact with realities and identity references often distant from those they know and dominate. Living with literature since childhood enriches human development in its multiple spheres (Coelho, 2000).

Every moment of the story - with its values, ideals, and foundations - was unique to the constitution of children's literature as we currently know it. A historical path marked and continues to mark the trajectory of fairy tales as a simultaneous process of changing each era's culture and social thought. The delineation of the concept of childhood and the representation of women or the family itself, among other examples, was being portrayed in the literature with productions that showed distinct historical conceptions about these phenomena. The view of childhood as a social construction and of the child as a subject of rights and desires is born with Modernity, but once these categories were referred to without any special distinction compared to other ages of life. The conceptions that take children as sensitive beings, to be protected from any and all evil, or as active, thinking, and critical beings of their history, have been developed over the last centuries, influenced by social processes (Ariès, 1981).

⁴This article presents partial results of research conducted by the first author under the supervision of the second.

Thus, the understanding that can be built on the place of traditional or classical fairy tales and contemporary tales in the relationship that children will build with children's literature or in the work developed on the subject by their teachers depends on how this contextualization is put into perspective. As the French historian Darnton (2015) warns, the historical and cultural context in which each tale was written leaves marks in the text that need to be considered and influence the interpretation and appropriation of it.

The "new fairy tales" are stories with characteristics specific to the current context. The woman, for example, is no longer represented solely and exclusively as a house figure who knows how to cook, sew, etc. Similarly, happy endings are not determinative of marriage, and princes are not necessarily strong and brave (Vidal, 2008). The changes in these texts portray the scientific growth and the historical-cultural specificities of current society and add new characteristics to the narratives. We know that, in the future, new versions and adaptations will emerge to supply and represent new times, desires, values, and ideals expected by the human being and will provide the process of identifying the new generations with this textual genre. As highlighted by Corso and Corso (2006), writing for children in contemporary times is "an imperative cultural need", which sensitively portrays their experiences, builds and deconstructs concepts and prejudices, and helps to think about them. The characters are like children's versions and allow their identification in different cases, fears and amazements, confusion, and the difficult task of being someone (Corso & Corso, 2006).

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that traditional or classic fairy tales also bring significant elements that can provoke identification movements in children by presenting scenes, characters, and social and identity references that, even historically dated, remain able to challenge them by contemplating the human universe and their passions, intrigues, fears, etc. This identification process depends, among other things, on the moment each child is living, their growth needs, and the meanings they can attribute to the narratives from their perspective and/or the mediation made by educators (Corso & Corso, 2006).

Nevertheless, when we seek to map the ties between fairy tales and school education, we often find evidence that their potential as a formative experience has been underestimated or underutilized. Many education professionals fear that - by giving literary experience a prominent place in educational practices - the results intended to be achieved with formal teaching and learning relationships will be compromised (Fischer & Silva, 2018). In the case of

fairly tales, this fear would be reinforced, in some situations, by the assumption that such productions contribute to “deceive” children, alienate them in a world of pure fantasy, or refer them to realities that do not match the experiences encompassed by a childhood lived by them. This idea seems to gain strength among those who forget the differences between the adult and child psyche or neglect the possibility of educational interventions that more satisfactorily meet the emotional and learning needs of children and adults (Gomes & Silva, 2019).

This scenario can be reviewed and undergo modifications that favor the achievement of improvements to the way school education has been promoted if this “ignorance of the child universe” and its impacts on educational processes are problematized (Radino, 2003).

Amid this process, one must critically evaluate the belief - widely held in common sense - that the fantastic causes the real and the imaginary to become detrimentally confused and should not be taken seriously but only serve as a distraction. This conception starts from a view of development based on traditional structures, without expecting the positive influence of fantasy or considering the existence of a fantastic that is proper and meaningful for childhood, by making possible the dreams and desires of children: to be a giant, to become king, queen, to be invisible, etc. Furthermore, it is essential to note that children, in general, are aware of what is imaginary and what is real when they are in a make-believe game, and these games are naturally accepted. So why bet that the situation would be markedly different in the case of the fantastic stories featured in the fairy tales? When beginning the reading or narration of a tale, a range of possibilities for the imagination to flow is inaugurated, but also several opportunities for children to put into action their abilities to remember or perceive differences and similarities between this imaginary universe and the realities they know, including their existential reality (Held, 1980).

Thus, it is important to emphasize that symbolic and imaginative language present in fairy tales can help the child to understand situations experienced in everyday life, create concepts, increase their mental capacities, and enhance the repertoire available to face the obstacles present in their developmental trajectory. This offers them more security and resources than delayed and imposing scientific conceptual explanations (Bettelheim, 2014; Radino, 2003).

Moving forward in this discussion, however, we cannot lose sight of the sociocultural character of all these psychological skills and processes whose development can be favored by

the presence of tales, and more broadly of literature, in the lives of children. After all, the development of such processes is always mediated by the social other. In the words of Vygotsky (1991), “real relations between individuals are at the basis of all higher functions” (p. 84).

As Sforzi (2008) notes, for a better understanding of this premise, it is worth remembering that the importance of social interactions in the school context, according to the Vygotskian approach, “is not restricted to the subject-subject relationship, but to the object that is present in this relationship – knowledge” (p. 2). The author concludes that,

to understand the school contents as cultural mediators attention turns not only to the teacher-student relationship, but above all to the relationship between teacher-knowledge-student. As human development occurs through the appropriation of the mental activity present in cultural mediators, teacher mediation can be a promoter of student development when scientific concepts – cultural mediators - are present in this interaction. (Sforzi, 2008, p. 1)

Hence, to problematize how to work with fairy tales in the classroom, mediation assumes a central place when we assume that this work involves the creation of diverse learning situations. In this context, it will be up to teachers to provide children with access to historically produced knowledge in literary works or discussed from their reading or study, favor the exchange of experiences between peers, undertake sensitive listening to the elaborations and inquiries produced by students, socialize their interpretations and knowledge, among other actions. Through the critical and creative appropriation of the knowledge shared in these learning situations and the experiences lived there, students can trigger the higher mental processes - perception, imagination, memory, thinking, etc. - and thus develop them (Sforzi, 2008, p. 7).

By taking into account the relevance of this “double mediation” - the one that concerns the teacher-student relationship and the one related to the student-school content relationship -, the school, represented especially by the teaching figure, can, through educational actions planned and executed with this intent, create conditions for children to actively participate in culture, appropriate it, and resignify it in this process (Vygotsky, 2009).

Research instruments and procedures

This research has a qualitative approach because it is “of particular relevance to the study of social relations due to the pluralization of life spheres” in contemporary society (Flick, 2009, p. 20). Moreover, this methodology “addresses the analysis of concrete cases in their local and temporal peculiarities, starting from the expressions and activities of people in their local contexts” (p. 37), as is the case of this study.

Its subjective relevance also characterizes it. In other words, it seeks not to lose sight of several interpretations related to the topic studied and the relevance of comparing them. Therefore, it considers the subjectivity of both the researchers and the research participants (Flick, 2009).

Besides being qualitative, the research assumes an ethnographic nature by inspiring assumptions of ethnographic research characterized by Laplantine (2003) as “the direct collection, and as detailed as possible, of the phenomena we observe” (p. 16).

The research design adopted included, at first, a bibliographic study. Thus, we seek to review and deepen the knowledge related to the topic through a survey of current investigations already conducted by other researchers (Marconi & Lakatos, 2011). The study considers the theoretical approach of concepts such as fairy tales, childhood, and mediation and contemplates studies conducted on these themes over the last decades. To this end, searches were made of works published in Portuguese in portals such as Google Scholar, Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (Ibict), and *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO), among others.

In a second moment, we proceeded with field research, which included the production and analysis of data related to the work with tales, conducted from June 2016 to September 2016 in two specific classes of Early Childhood Education in the city of Erechim, RS, which serve students in the age group of 3 to 5 years. The methodological instruments used were the interview and observation, which allowed to investigate experiences constructed by the teachers as part of their activities in working with fairy tales in the classroom, as well as the discursive productions they prepared when discussing these processes (Freitas, 2007).

Regarding the profile of the two teachers participating in the research, it is worth mentioning that Maria is 31 years old, attended Pedagogy at a public university, and, during the

research period, was studying for a master's degree at the same university. She had worked as a public school's early childhood education teacher for one year. Mariana is 32 years old, studied Pedagogy at a private university, and has a master's in education. At that time, she had worked as a teacher in Early Childhood Education for nine years and had been with the current class for two years. They were invited to participate in the research due to the area of training and work of both (Pedagogy and Early Childhood Education) and for having agreed to do a work with fairy tales in their classrooms, have the developed activities observed, and grant interviews on the research theme.

To guide the process of conducting the interviews, a script was used with some previously thought questions to facilitate the expression of the different points of view of the interviewees on the subject of the research. Thus, we obtained information in the form of documentation for the future interpretation and analysis of the data collected (Flick, 2009). This script consisted of 14 questions that sought to identify: 1) What do they think about childhood and the importance of literature, especially fairy tales, in children's lives; 2) What do they think about working with fairy tales in the classroom context; 3) If they work with fairy tales in their daily practice; 4) What benefits do they believe fairy tales can bring to children, their development, and their learning; 5) What influences do they perceive that the tales have on the child, in the construction of their identity; 6) What influences do they perceive beyond the classroom, what kind of proximity do children have to this thematic universe; 7) What are they based on to choose the tales and with what objectives; 6) How is the approach given after telling the story; 8) What is the preference when choosing the tales between the classics and the contemporaries; 9) Do they feel some difficulty when choosing a fairy tale. If so, which ones; and 10) If difficulties are encountered when working them in the classroom. If so, which ones.

In the interview process, a proposal was also made that involved asking the teacher to plan an activity with the class under her responsibility, including working with a fairy tale. The organization of this work could be according to her preference. It means it was conducted from her own choices and the free action of the teacher. At that time, each participant was also asked for permission to observe the work they performed in the classroom with the children.

As for using observation as a research instrument is worth clarifying its social meaning since the observer also has their perceptions and experiences and needs to closely look at the objectives outlined to capture significant details of the research (Ludke & André, 1986). In this

study, the observation was made on the day that the teachers participating in the research performed the work with fairy tales.

At the end of the research, the teachers were interviewed again to identify their opinions and perceptions about the work they did in the classroom with fairy tales. This experience made it possible to analyze and reach detailed conclusions about the research on the teachers' work context. The narratives produced during the interviews were used to document the reflections on the work with fairy tales and served as analysis material for the conclusions on the research topic.

All collected data were classified and divided into categories for better analysis organization. Aligned with Bardin (2010), we understand that “classifying elements into categories impose the investigation of what each of them has in common with others. What will allow their grouping is the common part existing between them” (p. 146). Thus, the grouping was conducted after investigating given the congruences or similarities between the contents that emerged in the research. The data that stood out as discrepant were also the object of closer consideration by the researchers, who considered their relationship with the contents grouped by similarity.

We seek to be careful with the ethical details of the research and the relationship established with the participants. We dialogued with them about their rights and created opportunities for them to express their possible doubts and concerns about the nature and objectives of the study, research instruments, and procedures, etc. Furthermore, it should be noted that the participants were welcomed voluntarily and were informed of the possibility of withdrawing from participation in the research at any time. A free and informed consent form was also used - read together with the participants for later collection of their signatures - which authorized the interviews, observations, and subsequent analysis of the data produced in these research situations.

Analysis and discussion of results

For the discussion, based on the analysis of the data obtained in the field research, the material was organized into two thematic sections: 1) What teachers think about childhood and

the importance of literature in children's lives and 2) The work with fairy tales in Early Childhood Education.

What teachers think about childhood and the importance of literature in children's lives

Each professional's childhood view has repercussions on how they conceive the importance of working with fairy tales with children, how it should be conducted, and its possible influence on child development. Thus, to talk about working with fairy tales, it is necessary to expand reflections on childhood and education at this stage of human development because "for there to be a children's literature, there must be a childhood" (Hillesheim & Guareschi, 2006, p. 110).

In the interview with Maria, she shared her view about the multiple childhoods and the historicity that mark them, in the different spheres and social environments where the child is inserted - which points to different cultures, ways of living, and relating:

As it was acquiring space, right, because it was not considered the way it is nowadays. But childhood in fact, it is not only a childhood, there are several childhoods, that each one lives differently. My childhood was different from yours, the childhood of children today is different from those of old days, each reality, each person has a different childhood.

Literature does not remain indifferent to the transformations related to the perceptions built about childhood. In fact, it even represents or translates some of them insofar as every text relates to the sociocultural and historical context in which it is produced (Darnton, 2015). In the countless versions of fairy tales, we can see the representation of childhood that prevails in each age and culture. Making this historical construction visible allows children to come into contact with different realities, think about changes, imagine them at that time, and differentiate and contrast their reality with other possibilities.

When reporting her thoughts on the theme of childhood, Mariana, in turn, highlights a concern with the current context in which children live and points out that they cannot concentrate on something for a long time and do not have as much stimulation to the imagination because currently, in her words, "everything is industrialized", and access to

technologies occurs early in the lives of children. Hence, the interviewee's concern with the children's ability to deal with imaginative language and how much it is being fostered in contemporary times is evidenced.

Mariana also mentions the contradiction she sees between what she tries to teach as correct for children and what they have access to in their daily lives - such as drawings and advertisements that show disobedience and violence - and places these situations as influencing childhood and contrary to the objectives of the teaching work.

The two research participants share the same perspective that fairy tales are very important in forming the subject and its particularities. They are great influencers in the development of imaginative language and critical thinking. They also highlight children's involvement with them when they work in the classroom. This is what we observe in this speech of Maria: *"When we tell them, it is as if they live the story, as if they enter the story, they get very involved in these fairy tales."*

The involvement that stories provoke in children as well as the mediation that can be made from what they point out, enable not only the promotion of imagination but also the discussion of worldviews and opinions held by children on relevant topics. In this sense, Mariana comments that the children's contact with the tale

it will awaken their imagination, it will awaken their worldview, it will awaken that thing that a house doesn't have to be made of bricks or a building doesn't have to be just one apartment on top of the other, I think it favors in general.

Working with fairy tales in Early Childhood Education

Through the analysis of the interviews and the observations made, it was possible to notice that the teachers participating in the research work with fairy tales in their daily lives in the classroom. While Maria does not differentiate or discriminate between traditional and contemporary fairy tales, Mariana privileges, in the work done in the classroom, contemporary fairy tales - she even considers that traditional fairy tales contribute to alienating children, but does not exclude the possibility of working with them, especially when it is the children themselves who request them:

The traditional fairy tales, I don't approach much, because I think they bring a view that leaves children alienated. ... I try to approach more real tales not so fanciful in the sense that they bring a more real moral, more from their daily lives like this, that is not a fable that is far from their daily lives.

This question that emerges in Mariana's testimony refers to the important debate about using classical fairy tales in education. There is an attempt to remove from the stories with which children will have contact the allusion to feelings such as fear and anguish or situations such as misfortune and punishment, in order to alleviate contents that all children inevitably end up facing in their daily lives. At the same time, we observe the predilection for contemporary tales based on the justification that they do not suffer from the excess of fantasy in the classics.

However, the children themselves seek references for their personal growth and find representations of ideas that inhabit their imagination in fairy tales. In childhood, children learn to relate their internal and external worlds and deal with them (Bettelheim, 2014). Through contact with these challenging themes (fear, anguish, etc.) portrayed in the stories they read or listen to, they can look more distantly at themselves, better analyze their needs and desires and evaluate what is necessary to solve or modify.

As stated by Bettelheim (2014), the happy endings of fairy tales do not want to refer to the external reality that the subject will only be happy that way. Still, by ending in this way, they bring security to children so that they can overcome their fears and internal conflicts and have the opportunity to deal with their own issues. After all, "no children believe that they will be a prince or a princess, but that they will be able to govern their own life" (Radino, 2003, p. 193).

Hence, the imaginative language brought in fairy tales allows the experience and significant contact with different realities, feelings, and situations and externalizes the needs of the child's internal universe. The narration of stories in childhood acts as a stimulus for subjectivity and is a fertile source for imaginative language. Thus, we think that this contact with the fantasy world in classic fairy tales contributes to child development and mediates between the child and social and psychic reality.

Still, literature is subject to transformations in different historical moments and is transformed over time, according to the context and the needs and interests regarding childhood thinking. Moreover, access to short stories produced in different historical moments is productive since giving children the opportunity to contact views of different realities and

encourage them to connect “their knowledge and ideas to broader contexts” (Brasil, 1998, p. 172) is what allows them to “build increasingly elaborate knowledge” (p. 172).

The mediation made by teachers is fundamental in this process, starting with the initiative to be attentive to the manifestations of children in the face of the characters’ ways of being, acting, and feeling; to the power relations established from the interactions; to the ethical and aesthetic standards presented; and to the concepts of good and bad, etc. For this, the professional must have in perspective that their role is to train children as readers and as subjects of knowledge so that they can become aware of these issues and know how to interpret them critically, in order to expand the horizons of understanding and action of the child (Abramovich, 1997). When planning the work with the tales, it is also up to the teachers to analyze in advance the content of the stories, the exploration that can be made of them, and the space to be given for the elaborations of the children. One question, in particular, cannot be lost from perspective: how to make it easier for the child to produce a reflection on this story? According to the approaches and strategies designed to work a certain tale, it is possible to help children see that people and social relations transform through the ages according to the culture, historical moment, social class, ethnicity, or generation considered. It is about getting students from Early Childhood Education to know other worlds to problematize and better understand their own.

As much as some people see limitations in working with classic fairy tales, it is possible to make good explorations from them. Letting children come into contact with other times, different from their own, will allow them to think about the specifics of these, relate them to the present moment, and make differentiations and reflections about this contraposition, especially if they can count on the help of the teacher and colleagues in this process. Thus, it is okay to distance it from their daily life, as this is the focus of fantasy, to show other universes of possibilities, “another ethics, another optics” (Abramovich, 1997, p. 17).

Zilberman (1998) also argues that children have this ability to reflect on different values and worldviews and that literature, in this sense, fulfills its role as a “trainer”, because, if the fairy tale can clarify the inconstancies of the child’s inner world, “it also transmits to its recipient a base from which an autonomous and, therefore, the critical conception of external life is founded” (p. 25). We want to explain here that contact with literature is important in constructing a critical subject, autonomous, and capable of playing an active role in constructing their own preferences, choices, and actions. Therefore, the mediation exercised by their teachers

in approaching this universe must consider that the work with the literary text is not reduced to a mere school task that serves only as a pretext to teach content from other areas (sciences, mathematics, Portuguese language, history, etc.). From planning to realizing this mediation, there must be space for children to have a voice and time in the process. In other words, they can participate by choosing works, discussing ideas, sharing their experiences in interactions with teachers and peers, and resolving doubts, among other possibilities.

Thus, the formative role of fairy tales is evident, which are a reference in making people think through fantasy, with a background of knowledge that produces actions on childhood and the integral formation of subjects. But it is also immersed in “invention, creation of other possible worlds, estrangement, experimentation, advent of the new” (Hillesheim & Guareschi, 2006, p. 123).

Mariana described a moment lived in the classroom that evidences this, when one of her students went to the bookshelf, took the book *Hansel and Gretel*, and asked if he could tell this story to his colleagues. The teacher let the child tell the story in his own way and then problematized with the class the issues that stood out most in the story. The report presented generates numerous possibilities for analysis, among them the significant mediation made by teacher Mariana, who, after reading, organized a debate among the children and directed them to talk about their perceptions of the story. In this mediation, the teacher asked the children questions, such as “*And have you seen any situation like this?*” or “*What does this remind you of?*” She also asked children whether or not they liked the story, why or whether anyone believed it should differ, and how they would write its ending.

In this approach, the children, together with the teacher, discussed the attitudes that the characters had in the situation. Mariana said in the interview that a girl said: “*But it was right for Gretel to have called the police, she shouldn't have thrown the witch on the stove.*” At that moment, the children were available to think about their values, ideals, and opinions about the situation, an important resource for building their identities (Kielb & Silva, 2020).

In Mariana's classroom - due to the planning of work with tales as well as the spontaneous situations in which this work emerges as a possibility - children have space to express their opinions and freedom to express emotions that, as she recognizes, sometimes translate experiences of suffering and helplessness. We observed that the mediation made by this teacher enabled the children to attribute different meanings to the tale, based on reflections

constructed at the time, which attests that the activity performed was not characterized as a teaching and learning space with strict rules dictated by the teacher.

It is worth mentioning that the teacher did not choose to work with that tale in her planning, but was invited by the children (who had room for it) to approach a classic tale and, embargued by the numerous senses they gave to this tale, generated a reflective and questioning mediation at that time, that is, ended up making a good exploration of the tale. With this report, she demonstrated that classical tales could generate good discussions and provide significant constructions for children, depending on their approach.

When reporting a difficulty she encounters when working with fairy tales in the classroom, the same teacher mentioned that she believes that the work done in school is contradictory to the context experienced by children at home or to the content to which they have access through television, because it is, for example, children's programs in which the characters are disobedient or have attitudes considered by her as incorrect.

Hence, we enter into an argument generated by the same prejudice that classic fairy tales suffer. Whether or not they have access to content such as those present in the tales and television programs, it is important for the emotional and social development of children that they may have the opportunity to dialogue about the feeling that certain situations mobilize in them, what these feelings represent to them and the actions and reactions that they can trigger. An example is the hostile feelings aroused in children when they are asked to act in a certain way and do not understand or do not agree with it. They can learn, with the help of literature and dialogue mediated by the other about this art and from it, that other children and adults also experience such hostile feelings. This is one of the possible ways to understand that these feelings exist for someone else besides them: having contact, even if imaginary, with experiences that help them process issues that would otherwise remain open or poorly elaborated.

Even if they do not have the possibility of dialoguing about the stories, children can overcome fears and traumas through catharsis, as described by Freud (1913/1996): projecting their feelings on some character or some situation in the story - through this means they relive what is painful or incomprehensible to them, which allows, in many cases, the glimpse of new perspectives of the meaning of these feelings. It also occurs in some children, especially those of young age, who try to work out their emotions and repressed tensions and incorporate them - in scenarios lived in games or daily interactions with other people - gestures and sayings that

simulate those presented by characters of the stories with which they had contact. All these examples illustrate processes that have to do with the “psychological depth” that the tale “is capable of reaching and how it offers schemes that put children to think” (Corso & Corso, 2006, p. 264).

Radino and Oliveira (2009) are also dedicated to explaining why the symbolism in fairy tales is important for children:

As a toy, children use the symbolism of fairy tales to express their anguish. Using the characters, both good and bad, they can identify with each of them, at different times, as soon as their need and anguish are aroused. (p. 34)

Nevertheless, working with fairy tales in the school space and optimizing these possibilities was pointed out by the research participants as a challenging process for several reasons: it requires prior dedication to readings; time for selecting stories and planning the mediation that will be conducted; coordination of the activities thought with other programs considered by the institution where they work; and effort spent on the implementation of activities in the classroom since the process of storytelling, the narration of stories for children “is not something so simple,” according to the interviewees. It requires teachers to be aware of the possibilities of dramatization of the story and the use of additional resources (puppets, illustrations, etc.), interaction with students (their reactions, questions, etc.), the mediation process, among other issues they point out that concern their own school culture and their liturgies, which make the work with tales to be meant as “an atypical activity”, which “breaks the routine” – and even children have already learned to identify the day they work with tales as “feast day”, an exception to the rule in traditional school life.

Problematizing this school reality, Radino and Oliveira (2009) point out that, in it, “the emotion, fantasy, and creativity, both of students and teachers, must be standardized and fitted into a model of what was determined as culture and society” (p. 20). Thus, the need for imagination and fantasy is sometimes seen as something to be controlled to ensure the construction of knowledge and the adequacy of children’s actions in a regulated world (Radino & Oliveira, 2009).

Moreover, we can see that the mediation process begins long before the moment after the tale is told. This process initially involves the planning pointed out by the teachers, in which

they analyzed the possibilities of intervention, the resources to be used, and the best approach for their classes, and took care of aspects such as the choice of stories that would be of interest and preference to the children. This approach, according to them, aims to reinforce playfulness, generate engaging interactions, and awaken motivation in students for their approach to the literary universe.

The two teachers reported that they commonly seek to provide opportunities for children to experience different learning situations and experiences. For this, they alternate between telling the story with the book in hand, showing the images contained in it; bringing the characters of the story in the form of puppets; orally telling the story in an adapted version, using their own words; and let the children tell the story through the previous reading they have or through the images. All these options are generally followed or interspersed by moments of discussion, fostering reflection via questions and socializing impressions. The teachers demonstrated this is a prominent moment in their classes, concerned with making it attractive to children. These are the different facets that the mediation process can take on in the work developed by them.

As observed in the Pre-A room, teacher Maria told the story “Little Red Riding Hood” without the support of the book orally and emphasized the aspects of the story that, for her, were striking - it is a specific narration for that moment, for those children, and situation. The oral story is a unique and exclusive experience of that moment since it is a narrative created and thought for that reality and context.

In the reports of the interview, teacher Maria mentioned that most of the students in this class identified themselves and liked very much the stories in which the character of the big bad wolf appeared. This was evident in the observation because it was possible to visualize the children’s enthusiasm when the teacher narrated the scene where he appears; the murmurs and the apparent anxiety in their eyes reveal how excited they were about the allusions to the character.

The way to narrate the story becomes, as it has always been, important to create a context that involves children and privileges the exploration of the imagination - when telling a story orally, a field for expression is opened, by the voice, by the body, and by the action of those who tell it. It also becomes a flexible and playful space, enabling the teller and listeners to

interact. And in addition, young children more easily appropriate narratives expressed orally to use them as a reference (Girardello, 2007).

The effects of this and other mediations conducted by teacher Maria that address fairy tales were highlighted by her in her interview:

The other day they were playing in the playground, and one of them was the wolf, so he took over, he scared others, then he jokingly pointed with his finger “if you don’t open the door” it was the three little pigs, “if you don’t open the door I’ll blow” (laughs) they reproduced the story right.

We can see, with this report of Maria, how significant the activity was for her students, who somehow reverberate what caught their attention and/or affected them, sometimes disseminate what they learned in other contexts - such as playing, in symbolic games, interaction with their peers and with other subjects beyond the school environment - and weave bridges between different languages, that is, they make associations with other content, scenes, and situations in life.

Hence, it is appropriate to conduct a more detailed analysis of the mediation strategy employed by teacher Maria in her class: while she told the story, she went through the children, moving their hair, making sounds near their desks, bringing them to the story, highlighting the nature of the play that the story can bring, drawing laughter, sighs, jumps, enthusiasms, making her delivery visible, willingness to interact and emotional state when telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

All these actions that are part of mediation are engaging, use resources of theatricality and playfulness, work sensory, perceptual, and emotional capacities, while exploring the cognitive and linguistic skills of children, who seemed to value the activity and consider it significant and attractive. Furthermore, in this type of mediation, the imagination is put into action when children, instead of waiting for the narration of what is to come, create images and scenes, anticipate events and build scenarios, make connections with their own lives reality, as we saw in the example of the girl who suggests that the police be called to arrest the big bad wolf.

Maria ponders that children’s reactions can be diverse when exposed to this type of mediating intervention, but she seeks to welcome all of them with the same interest and receptivity. In front of, “What a fear!” said a student when confronted with the fierce face of

the wolf, for example, she may ask, “What are you afraid of, Pedro?” and then amend, “What about the others? How do you feel when you listen to this story?” Thus, one can start a conversation that has its course defined by the needs and interests of children and bet on the possibility of the educational experience being formative and transformative.

The analysis of this excerpt of testimony allows us to glimpse how the quality of mediation can impact, positively or negatively, students’ relationship with the literary text. The relevance of this fact is indisputable if we consider that the formation of readers and the encouragement for the “taste of reading” constitute a challenge that the area of education currently faces. Maria’s interventions - gesturing, imitating the characters and sensitizing students with the facts narrated so that they feel comfortable expressing emotions, inviting them to play with her some parts of the story, etc. - had a positive effect, stimulated the active participation of the class in the lesson. The way Maria was involved in mediating has to do with her view of childhood, teaching, school, and the symbolic universe of literature itself. Her belief that it is necessary to know the students and the realities where they participate in providing them with better conditions for the construction of knowledge - as well as the perspective she sustains on the importance of the apprentice subject in its integrality - offers the coordinates for a work with the tales based on these assumptions. This finding corroborates the perspective that a teacher attentive to development in its affective and social dimension is more likely to coordinate actions that, without losing sight of the cognitive, help children to understand their own emotions and those of those around them and deal with them; face fears and anxieties that sometimes dress up as monsters; and expand their repertoires of action when challenged to resolve their interpersonal conflicts. We also note that Maria’s choice of this form of mediation is related to her life trajectory and training. She says she has had contact with fairy tales since she was a little girl and pointed out that she has always liked them: “*it’s something that since when we went to class we already liked them*”. She continues her narrative by reporting that this taste continues to be present in her daily life when she chooses a tale for her students.

In the Pre-B class, of teacher Mariana, it was also possible to observe very instigating moments. The teacher began by calling all the children to the story circle and sat with them - she was present at that moment exclusively for contact with the story. She made a mediation of initial exploration of the book, she told its title, and explored the data present in the work, such as the names of the author, and the illustrator.

The story brought to the activity was “The Ervilline and the Prince”, written by Ortoff (2009), a contemporary tale of the original version of “The Princess and the Pea”, by Hans Christian Andersen. In the initial interview, when commenting on the planning of the work with tales, Mariana had mentioned the story as a possibility of contemporary tale that she would address: “*I would tell, for example, the story of Ervilline, but I would not tell The Princess and the Pea.*” The teacher in question has an undeniable preference for contemporary tales and a certain objection to classical tales. She admitted in the interview that she had no contact with classical fairy tales, which affected how she sees literature nowadays. She narrated a fact that distanced her from this universe: as a child, she was an agitated student, and her punishment was to go to the library and stay without borrowing books while her colleagues read, experienced, and borrowed storybooks to read at home or in other environments. For this reason, she did not have much contact with fairy tales, which she currently says are not her preferred choices for telling stories to students.

Mariana developed a mediation focused on oral storytelling with the support of the book - she changes the tone of voice when she wants to highlight something present in the images presented and thus holds the children’s attention in the story. They seemed to find the illustrations curious and even funny, making comments and questions to the teacher. The book’s poetic language also caught the children’s attention, who let out laughter, finding it funny. In this case, the choice to tell the story with the book was very well received by them. Some wanted to take the work and look more closely at its figures. The teacher bets, therefore, as proposed by Corso and Corso (2011), that “it is in the corporeal substance of the book-object ... that we already see its specificity” (p. 307). Thus, by holding a book composed of certain colors, illustrations, and letter formats, we are transported to the universe of the story told vividly and strikingly.

In line with this idea and continuing the established mediation, the teacher was passing the book on to the children, reinforcing the attention in the illustrations, in the representation of characters and artifacts such as the prince, the queen, the castles, the mattresses, and the embroidered sheets, significant characteristics present in the book. Responding to this intervention, some children could already establish autonomous reading through the images.

We believe that, as seen in the classroom of the teacher in question, for such activities with reading, it is important that students are involved in the mediation process to feel part of the group and perceive reading as something pleasurable.

The teacher, as a mediator, encourages the relationship between the child and fairy tales and provides these moments of reflective activity. Mendes and Velosa (2016) explore the benefits that literature can bring to childhood and highlight the important role of the “adult mediator” who, in contact with literature, “seems essential to help the child understand, through identification projection, their own emotions, their feelings, their concerns and their existential and affective problems” (p. 130).

As we have seen, each teacher’s mediation to make these experiences is fundamental because “children do not learn only by direct exposure to the stimulus, but through someone who serves as a mediator between them and the environment” (Siqueira, 2013, p. 123). The stories allow children to come into contact with various realities, sometimes softer than theirs, sometimes more complex, expanding their views and perceptions about the world around them. Therefore, “it is necessary that in the practices offered by the mediator, it can be felt that he, mediator, understands literature not as a neutral text, but a substrate endowed with a sociocultural complexity” (pp. 123-124).

Final remarks

Fairy tales are stories that traverse the ages, originated in orality, and change as they are retold or compiled into written collections. This article presented reflections on the relevance of working with fairy tales in the classroom. It sought to analyze what teachers working in Early Childhood Education say and demonstrate the activities they develop as part of this work and the challenges they face in developing it.

Therefore, interviews were conducted with the teachers and observations of their work with the classes. Notes were recorded on how the mediations they built in the context of this work were conducted in practice.

As a result of the research, it was possible to identify the importance given to imaginative language as an irreplaceable instrument in human formation, with emphasis on the literary

qualities of the tale and the involvement that children demonstrate with this type of language. The mediating interventions built by the teachers contributed to children's development and learning and promoted a playful and pleasurable approach to the universe of literature. Encouraging reading proved to be a natural consequence of this process, attested by the students' reactions to making enthusiastic later references to the stories - in other classes and in the games with peers that occurred in the courtyard, for example - and requesting more readings.

We found important aspects to which teachers draw attention when telling the story: the narration constructed for the moment, the choice of the literary text, the use of the book as an instrument, privileged pedagogical approaches, and their objectives. Also, the teachers participating in the research also pointed out the differentiation between classical and contemporary fairy tales. They pointed out that the choice for one or the other type is based on the particular view that each professional holds on childhood, Early Childhood Education, and literature, as well as on the knowledge he holds on the subject in question.

It also evidenced the importance of teachers considering the effects that working with these different types of tales can produce in the training of their students. Very rich experiences in questions, reflections, and learning can emerge from activities conducted in this context. The attentive look and careful listening of the professional are necessary for the effectiveness of mediation attentive to the needs and interests of children. The teacher can work these encounters between children and literature, exploring the situations in which children have their curiosity aroused, presenting questions, talk about their feelings, impressions, and thoughts. Based on this, it becomes possible to make bridges between fantasy and real experiences and invite children to make them, build knowledge together, and contribute to their formation as autonomous, critical, and creative subjects.

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