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DEVELOPING READING SKILLS THROUGH FAIRY TALES

DEZVOLTAREA ABILITĂȚILOR DE CITIT PRIN POVEȘTI

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Rezumat

În acest articol se examinează problema dezvoltării abilităților de citire ale copiilor și utilizarea citirii ca metodă de învățare a unei limbi. Autorul acordă o atenție deosebită rolului poveștilor în acest proces. Autorul vorbește și despre metoda de lucru cu o poveste la lecțiile de limbă engleză pentru a dezvolta creativitatea copiilor și a le stimula procesul de învățare a limbii.

Cuvinte-cheie: limba engleză, dezvoltarea abilităților de citire, metodă de învățare a unei limbi, poveste, citire, copii.

Abstract

The present article examines the issue of developing children's reading skills and the use of reading as a method of learning a language. The author pays special attention to the role of fairy tales in this process. The author also talks about the method of working with a fairy tale in the course of English lessons to develop children's creativity and stimulate their language learning.

Key-words: English language, reading skills development, language learning method, fairy tale, reading, children.

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.

Richard Steel

Reading is an essential part of learning English. Children first begin to speak and listen, then they learn to read and write. Reading is an important stage of a child's growth, personal evolution and education. Reading teaches children how to correctly construct sentences and express their thoughts. While reading in English, children also get to know more about the culture of the English-speaking people, replenish their vocabulary with useful expressions and enrich their speech with interesting phrases. Children's literature is the art which is closely related to pedagogics, as its mission is to educate taking into account the age characteristics, abilities and needs of the child. That is why stimulating children's reading is of vital importance.

Unfortunately, from year to year the interest of children in reading books decreases. One of the reasons for this negative process is the growing influence of media on them. Reading books is replaced by hours of television viewing. Family libraries are being replaced by video libraries and computer games. In this regard, the formation of a child's interest to reading books remains very relevant. Particular attention to this pedagogical problem should be paid in elementary school.

It should be noted that it is namely traditional children's literature with its fairy tales that contributes to the moral education of children, which is a very important aspect in the process of personality formation and developing of literary culture. Fairy tales are stories that grew from the lives and imagination of the people. One of the most interesting and important characteristics of these tales is their universal character. No theory adequately explains this phenomenon, but the tales of all cultures, regardless of their geography and origin, are remarkably similar.

A fairy tale plays a significant role in a child's life. First of all, it develops imagination, thinking and literacy. It also helps to form a system of moral values, a basis for communication and behavior. The most important thing in a fairy tale is that good always triumphs over evil. A child of a primary school has a very developed mechanism to identify himself/herself with a positive character. This means that by reading tales children learn to distinguish good from evil.

Bruno Bettelheim, an educator and therapist, in his psychoanalytical study of fairy tales "*The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*" writes that "*nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale*" [1, p. 5]. Bettelheim further explains that "*the more he tried to understand why these stories are so successful at enriching the inner life of a child, the more he realized that these tales, in a much deeper sense than any other reading material, start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being*" [1, p.6].

Bruno Bettelheim thinks that "*while it entertains the child, the fairy tale enlightens him about himself, and forces his personality development...*" [1, p. 12]. Bruno Bettelheim is undoubtedly right in stating that "*fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as no other form of art is*" [1, p. 12].

Lack of interaction with literature has produced significant deficiencies in the children's use of language resources, imaginative potential and creative thinking skills. Some empirical studies reveal that the children who are exposed to literature get better results not just in languages or literature, but in mathematics, physics, history as well. More than that, teaching foreign languages through traditional children's literature can motivate and stimulate the learners for better studying of the subject.

Our national writer and famous teacher Ion Creanga devoted himself to education through fairy tales. Creanga's fairy tales are of great pedagogical value. They are good source of studying the old pedagogical traditions of our country. Creanga first of all strove to change the old system and old teaching methods. He considered teaching to read and write as a means of developing mental abilities and upbringing, defended the principle of the sequence of study from familiar to unfamiliar, from concrete to abstract.

Creanga widely used the educational role of fairy tales of his native language in his pedagogical practice. Creanga's own tales have become classics of national literature. Widely known as masterpieces of the Moldovan literature and local humor, his works fall somewhere between a collection of folklore sources and an original contribution to pedagogical system of Moldova. Creanga's fairy tales introduce children to a huge world in which "*all things are not*

what they seem; once they were something different from what they are now” [2, p. 135]. This approach awakens the child's imagination, helping him/her, living an unreal situation to better understand the basic values of the real world.

Using traditional literature in the classroom will restore the balance between physical and intellectual, aesthetic and pragmatic, literal and figurative, which are all essential aspects of learning.

But how to find the way to stimulate children's reading? It is difficult for a child to make a choice: to read or not to read, what exactly to read? Helping him/her to fall in love with a book to understand its benefits, to find joy and satisfaction in reading an artwork, is the task of parents and teachers. Primary school teachers need to take care of a child's soul, fill it with spiritual and moral values.

The world of fairy tales is beautiful and exciting for children. They are captured by the sharp, entertaining plot of fairy tales, the unusual situations in which the events unfold. They are attracted by heroes – brave, strong, resourceful, daring people. Fairy tales win over with their ideological orientation: good forces always win. For children, the very form of the narration adopted in the fairy tale, the melodiousness, the colorfulness of the language, the brightness of the pictorial means are very interesting. The images in fairy tales are colorful, and they are clearly divided into kind, fair, deserving respect personages or evil, greedy, envious ones.

The influential power of the images and the plot of the fairy tale are so vivid that the schoolchildren, already in the process of the first reading, clearly show their sympathies and antipathies to the characters, completely take the side of the oppressed, disadvantaged personages, being ready to help them. Children are sincerely happy that justice is winning: ordinary poor people get out of trouble, and evil people perish, that is, evil is punished, good has triumphed. Children always want everything be like this in the real life. In this, first of all, is the great pedagogical value of the fairy tale.

A fairy tale develops the value judgments of schoolchildren: in the process of analyzing a fairy tale, they repeatedly face the questions: “What (what qualities) are most valued in people? What are they punished for and what are they encouraged for? Why do even the forces of nature come to the rescue some heroes of fairy tales, and from some they, on the contrary, turn away?”, etc. Fairy tales have great potential for positive moral teachings (in the pedagogical sense of the word).

The strong side of fairy tales is their active, effective focus on victory, on the triumph of truth, their happy ending, which specifically appeals to children, their attitude to the world. The plot of a fairy tale is not real, far from life, but the conclusion is always viable: “A fairy tale is a lie, but there is a hint in it – a lesson for good fellows”.

The cognitive side of the tale is extremely important. In a folk tale, its creator, the folk, tells about its life. Therefore, individual details of the narration about work, about everyday life, about material privations and hardships allow children to imagine the peculiarities of the life of the people at a certain time, as well as the thoughts and dreams of the people. However, the main value is not so much in showing individual moments of the life of the people, but in

the peculiar approach to depicting the people. The people are talented, hardworking, generous, inventive, artisan and master-hand.

The importance of fairy tales as a means of developing children's speech is great. The text of fairy tales is an excellent material for the formation of coherent speech skills. Younger schoolchildren willingly tell fairy tales, preserving fabulous figurative expressions and figurative means (comparisons, epithets), as well as the peculiar syntactic structure of speech, sentence structures, and liveliness of the story adopted in fairy tales.

In the elementary grades of the school, according to the program, children get acquainted with the peculiarities of the fairy tale as a genre of folklore. The two essential features of the tale are the presence of fiction and compositional originality: beginning, repetitions, and ending. One main episode is usually repeated in a fairy tale. In this case, the last time after the episode is repeated, as a rule, a contrasting event occurs and a denouement follows. Repetitions occur most often because more and more new characters appear in the tale or new details are introduced.

Of course, each fairy tale has its own compositional feature. Therefore, only on the basis of the above specificity of the composition of the tale, schoolchildren cannot make a conclusion about whether the fairy tale is in front of them or not. It is important to teach schoolchildren, when recognizing the genre of a work, to take into account the totality of its features. According to the tradition established in literary criticism, fairy tales are divided into three groups: fairy tales about animals, magic and everyday novelistic ones.

The method of analysis of fairy tales at the school involves the following forms and techniques for working with the text: selective reading, answering questions and posing questions by the children, verbal and graphic drawing, drawing up a plan, all types of retelling, drawing up a fairy tale by analogy with what was read and some others.

School practice convinces that children understand well the unreality of the world in fairy tales, the conventionality of the plot. They know, but they happily remain in this fabulous conventional world. And there is no pedagogical reason to destroy it. On the contrary, a teacher needs to tell the children a fairy tale in such a way and organize the conversation so that they would find themselves in this fairy-tale world for a while.

So, at first, the fairy tale is analyzed as a realistic story and everything is aimed at ensuring that children clearly perceive the specific content, correctly imagine the development of the plot, the motives of the behavior of the characters, their relationship (who supports whom and why). Only at the last stage of work on the fairy tale the teacher should put the children in the conditions of "transferring" the conclusion of the fairy tale into similar cases in real life. This is quite enough, on the one hand, for that a fairy tale remains a fairy tale for children, and on the other hand, children enrich themselves with an author's approach to certain phenomena of life.

A book should always surprise a child. He/she must plunge into an imaginary world of events and characters. So when children read an artwork, the literary heroes revive in their imagination. Therefore, it is useful in the teaching practice, after the discussion of the literary material, to apply the method of dramatization of the fairy tale. Such working method makes

it possible to teach children creative reading and at the same time allows them to develop their creative thinking abilities and enrich their vocabulary and emotional world.

It should be emphasized that in the process of reading fairy tales, the teacher is constantly working on the formation of such aspects of the reading skill as consciousness and expressiveness. Noticing the features of this or that character of the tale, the children seem to be reincarnated into the heroes and convey in a voice their intentions, their attitude towards others. Correctly structured work on the lexical meaning of the word and its use in a sentence also plays a significant role.

Work on a fairy tale largely follows a certain algorithm, i.e. a stable order of interactions between a teacher and students. Depending on the goal and tasks set by the teacher, the work can be organized by different methods and techniques. The work on a fairy tale can go on within 2-3 lessons, when the goals, objectives, methods and techniques of teaching children, and ways of working with them change.

Algorithm for working on a fairy tale

1. Preparatory work (music, slide show pictures, children's assumptions, vocabulary work).
2. Primary perception of the text (expressive reading of the teacher, listening to a fairy tale recorded from a disk).
3. Analysis of the tale (questions about the content of the text).
4. Secondary perception of the text (reading by children aloud in a chain, reading in pairs, reading to oneself).
5. Characteristics of the main characters, the main idea of the tale, work on the means of expressiveness of the tale and its genre features (dialogue on the text).
6. Work on expressive reading (working in pairs, reading by role).
7. Creative work (drawing up a plan, questions for a friend, creative retelling, performance).
8. The result of the work (what did the fairy tale teach?)

When working with a fairy tale, the teacher should pay special attention to the following activities, thus developing creativity of the children and stimulating language acquisition process:

- Reading the tale aloud
- Discussion of characters' behavior
- Painting of favourite personages
- Staging a fairy tale

These activities involve children in the process of learning the language, making it as successful and effective as possible. At the same time, children take reading as enjoyable. Creative reading is driven by the curiosity of a child. The purpose of the teacher is to contribute to the development of curiosity into inquisitiveness, to help the children not to dwell on memorizing facts but to search, to look for their logic causation.

A fairy tale is composed so that all phenomena of the objectively existing world, all objects of the imagination, are included in the action of a fairy tale, in its emotional sphere, as really acting forces. That is why a fairy tale is a fertile material for the development of a

child's recreational and creative imagination as important aspects of his/her emotional sphere and necessary for a full-fledged perception of the tales by the reader.

Schoolchildren develop the ability to actually evaluate the actions of the heroes; the teacher helps to single out positive, negative heroes, heroes-helpers among fairy-tale characters. As a rule, this is achieved by the technique of “dialogue with the text” – reading the actions of the characters and their thoughts from the text.

Peter Hunt, the author of “*An Introduction to Children’s Literature*” emphasizes that “*children’s literature is a powerful literature, and such power cannot be neutral or innocent... It is impossible to a children’s book not to be educational or influential in some way...*” [3, p. 3]

Thus, a fairy tale for a child is not just a fantasy, but a special reality that helps to establish for oneself the world of human feelings, relationships, the most important moral categories, in the future – the world of life meanings. The fairy tale takes the child out of the ordinary life and helps to bridge the distance between everyday routine and sense of life. This inner transition is possible only when the content of the tale has passed through empathy for another person.

- Working with fairy tales is teaching, educating, developing and even curative in nature.
- The fairy tale teaches courage, kindness and other good human qualities, but does it without boring instructions, just shows what can happen if a person does not act according to his conscience.
- The tale develops an aesthetic sense. It is characterized by the revelation of beauty in nature and man, the unity of the aesthetic and moral principles, the combination of real and fiction, vivid depiction.

Coming to the conclusion, I would like to remind the words of famous American writer Ray Bradbury: “*You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them*”.

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