

## The Role of Fairytales in a Child Development

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### Abstract

This work will draw the attention of the reader toward a special argument, which sometimes we fail to consider although it might be very important for the development of the child: fairytales, their meaning and role in the psychological development of the child.

Telling fairytales is not just a means of amusement; on the contrary, it contributes greatly to the cognitive and social development of the child. Through this study we wanted to show the role of the fairytales in developing imagination, their importance in the life of the children and their functions.

Our attention was focused on a table of world fairytales with their cultural characteristics and a special focus on the Albanian tales. There was made an analysis on the role of the fairytales, their adaptation to the Albanian culture and the representation of this culture through fairytales. It is noticed that exist some differences between the Albanian culture and the others.

The study was based on some surveys to parents and teachers as well as on a case study of two children, one of whom has been listening and reading fairytales in his childhood. There was made a comparison of the social development and pointed out their personality differences in building intrapersonal relations and their moral development. There was reached at conclusions as follows:

Fairytales help the children to know the traditions of their culture, their religions.

There are a great help for them in the construction of the interpersonal relationship and have a great influence on the morality notions.

It is always helpful to tell stories to our children because they will grow up sure for their personality, strong and able to distinguish the right and the wrong. They will be able to distinguish what is moral or not. Fairytales help their creative thinking.

We found out that the teachers think that the fairytales is important for growing up children with moral notions and strong belief in their own. We noticed some differences on the parent's opinions. They were afraid of imaginary friend of their child. They thought that the fairytales wasn't too much important for the development of their children. They thought the tales we just a way of entertainment nothing else.

**KEYWORDS:** Development, Fairytales, Imagination, Morality, Security, Social Relationship.

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### INTRODUCTION

The argument dealt with in this work, although significantly important, has often escaped the attention of the teachers and obviously of the parents, too.

**Tales: The role of tales in children's life; what meaning children give to tales; how children consider world; psychological development of children.** Tales are not only a means of amusement but also a strategy aimed at the cognitive and social development of the child. Through tales children are able to develop creative thinking

and at the same time create their own model on how to behave and construct interpersonal relations. The development of moral juice is another substantial role of tales: through tales children grow and develop their intellect. They can also develop imagination, an essential element of their formation. Most tales have almost the same characters whereas their subject covers almost the same arguments. However, this doesn't mean that there are no cultural differences in tale telling (actually, any nation has adapted such tales to its religion, rules and norms with the intention of developing the accurate moral meaning of such tales in its national children). Tales play a substantial role in making children aware of their origin and identity (Luthi, 1979). For example, Russians use Czars to identify characters in their tales. Any nation has adapted tale characters to its own history and culture. For example, if Princes and Princesses are characters of European tales, Mandarins and Silk Workers are characters of China ones. Albanian tales have been adapted to the history, traditions and religion of Albania. Albanian tales are built around children and their parents. At the centre of our tales was the family, the ethics, and the model of behaving by our social rules and norms.

The role of fairytales in development of morality and social cognition, and adaption with the Albanian culture

We may call them the childhood's non-substitutes. Fairytales influence not only on the development of moral values but also on the development of language in children. Fairytales read to children stimulate the feeling of justice and develop consciousness. Accordingly, families should read as many fairytales or short stories to their children before sleep. One of the most unforgettable moments of childhood is when your grandmother or grandfather or even your parents might have told you a fairytale or story. With the development of technology, we now hear tales or stories through TV or internet.

However, specialists warn parents to pay more attention to the new tellers of fairytales. Therefore reading tales is a substantial factor in strengthening parent – child relation.

Fairytales contain hidden treasures and are directed to the child's self-consciousness. Fairytale stimulates the feeling of justice and the belief that "very soon or later on, bad people will get caught, whereas good ones will get their reward". The child makes a simple moral judgment and compares his/her opinion with the end of the tale. Classic tales nowadays enter in our homes through movies or music. Such tales are more attractive due to diversified visual effects. We may affirm that TV screen has become the new tale teller. Children will always get enchanted by such a visual beauty, because, at any time, fairytales will be the key of any child's thoughts, feelings or beliefs. However, fairytales read by parents will always have a greater impact on children and the formation of their personality.

Parents who avoid reading traditional fairytales to their children, thinking that modern books are politically more correct, lose the chance of teaching to their children the moral code of life, says the expert of children development Sali Godart Blat ([www.bebia.ime.com](http://www.bebia.ime.com)). Indeed, recent surveys show that parents are increasingly avoiding reading to their children such traditional fairytales like "Cinderella", "Snow-white and the seven dwarfs", because they think such tales contain many stereotypes. Parents think that fairytales are incoherent and too harsh for children to create proper judgments. Therefore, mothers were afraid of reading fairytales to their children. The surveyed parents said that Cinderella was out-of-date, for the reason that she was forced to do the house chores, whereas the Golden Hair was very dark.

Fairytales which have been read for entire generations are of vital importance to child development. Traditional fairytales tell children that good triumphs over evil, by promoting kindness and generosity, says Blat. ([www.bebia.ime.com](http://www.bebia.ime.com))

The problem is that traditional stories tell children that physical changes do exist in life, and if they are not put at the condition of seeing such stereotypes, there will be no moral code on the basis of which they might develop.

Fairytales help children understand what is good and what is not. And this is not to be learnt directly through class lessons, makes it clear Blat.

It may look like a paradox to think that often children make up scary characters out of their fantasy, which are the basic source of their fears. Psychologists explain that the concept of magic is an essential milestone on child development for it allows them to find the right answers to any phenomena they still do not know or understand.

Particularly, some scholars (Musai, 1999) have shown that there exist a close correspondence between the structure of the fairytales and the psychological development of 4 to 8 years old children. According to them, everything is allowed in fairytales and nothing is forbidden. Various elements interact with each other. Lifeless objects and characters may bear human characteristics. There is no time and space rule, nor any physic or logic law. Any story has a law of its own, where everything is possible. Such a reality gives to the little reader a valuable tool for analyzing either the story he/she is reading or the society he/she is living in.

Fairytales contain such repeated expressions like “*And they lived happily ever after...*” which are very important to increase self-confidence in children. They also help in forming the belief that whatever the hard moments of life, one should never lose hope, because everything will pass and happier days will come. That is why children are able to face unexpected events more easily ([www.psiconline.it](http://www.psiconline.it)).

The protagonist of a fairytale is often alone in facing life injustices, although external allies might come to help him in case of great danger, just as parents do with their children in real life. In fairytales, war between good and evil, weakness and strength, is always at the center of the story. Here, good always triumphs over evil and deception. The child is introduced to any aspect of life, however he/she is nurtured with the idea that good is the appropriate means and he/she is also equipped with the proper incentives to never withdraw from his/her dreams and goals, for he/she, in the end, is going to succeed (Picherle, 2008)

Cartoon may also play the same role, but in such case there is little space for imagination, for the reason that the outer appearance of the characters and the environment they live in are already defined and leave no room for modifications. This is another reason why it is important that parents read fairytales to their children and discuss with them on such tales to better analyze and understand the characters and the events (Benjamin, 1962).

It is important that parents ask their children to make up and retell stories of their own. Often it is better that they focus on scary or negative elements, characters and phenomena, so that children might be stimulated to use their imagination and create their own elements to defeat evil ones ([www.psiconline.it](http://www.psiconline.it)).

Parents often get worried about the existence of imaginary friends in the life of their children. Psychologists of child development explain that children are always prone to develop such kind of friendship, an unreal one. It may be a doll or a toy, which frequently accompanies the child, or it may be a physically inexistent being, which may be present in his/her moments of fear. An adult may find it a weird behaviour, but there is nothing in it that may harm children; on the contrary it helps them better understand the surrounding world as the time goes by. It is totally wrong to scold your

child for his/her imaginary friend. He/she will remove it from his/her life once he/she is ready to face fear and difficulties alone. However, this imaginary friend should not fill the spaces of real friends and be no longer efficient (Karaj, 2000).

The educational importance of the fairytale, has been known for a long time. It is like a therapy, for the patient, who finds in it the solution to his problems. Fairytales are retold in various ways depending on the mood of the person at that particular moment of his/her life. We should never retell a fairytale to our child, once he/she finds it no longer interesting. There is always a preferred fairytale, where the child finds him/herself. When we tell a story to our child, we should always listen to what the child has to say. There are some things we should bear in mind while reading a fairytale to our child. First, we should not read stories other than the one our child is particularly fond of, neither should we ask him/her why he/she is particularly related to that story, for his/her imagination would be ruined. Second, we should demonstrate a real interest in a story that we read and not reveal it, for our child would no longer be curious and interested in that particular story (Musai,1999)

***Fairytales help children develop a vivid imagination.*** Nowadays it is believed that fairytales may harm the child because they detach him/her from the reality of everyday life; they are the fantasy of a place where children can fly away from reality. Indeed, fairytales may play a negative role in shaping a scientific mind, for they make children enter an imaginative world where things are quite different from the real ones ([www.bebia.ime.com](http://www.bebia.ime.com))

Children need fairytales to talk with their everyday language about the everyday life issues.

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The Albanian reality is a bit different from the other place. Albanians are used to talk about the relationship between parents and children. They are focused on the respect for the traditions and our social norms and rules. Albanians emphasize their emotions in telling the fairytales.

If we make the difference between the Snow White showed in Italian and in Albanian, we notice an emotional and sometime unreal feeling is transmitted to the children. In the Italian version the mother died from a grave illness. In the Albanian version she dies because of carelessness during sewing. There is an emotional load during the fairy tale story which makes children to experience anxiety.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out during the period April to June using mainly the questioner method interviewing 45 parents and 10 educators as well as a case study of two 8 years old children. We used the semi-structured interviews for both parents and educators. The observation of two children was aimed at certifying the opinion of educators and parents to role of the tales the study was focused on three different kindergartens (respectively 3 educators for each kindergarten and the director of one kindergarten) of the city of Vlore. We used to make questions to the educators about their opinion to the role of the tales and to verify their statements with the behaviour of their children. The other purpose was to interview each parent of the children when they come to take them home. The aim of this study was to know the opinion of the teachers and the parents and to make the difference between them. The performed interviews aim was to observe what parents and educators think about the role of tales in children development, how important is to raise children by amusing them and, at the same time, by showing them the right way to build interpersonal relations. Whereas, the case study aimed at highlighting two aspects of child development: social and psychological aspect. We have observed children's behaviour at home and at school, and their relation to mates and adults. Referring to the school environment, another important aspect of this study was the ability of children to think and use imagination in problem solving. Tales have a great impact in making children define roles and build their morality. Another observation has been performed with regard to the children personality. Teacher interviews allowed us to learn about their opinion on the role of tales and the work that they were doing in the development of children's imagination. In conversation with them showed us a fruitful method which consisted in telling the tales by the teacher and pupils used to draw their perception about that tales. These were the statements of the educators interviewed.

Results: We had the following answer at the end of the study; it is always helpful to tell stories to our children because they will grow up sure for their personality, strong and able to distinguish the right and the wrong. They will be able to distinguish what is moral or not. Fairytales help their creative thinking.

We found out that the teachers think that the fairytales is important for growing up children with moral notions and strong belief in their own. The 10 educators were all of the same opinion. They were sure of the role of the fairytales. They think that telling tales is one of the best ways to show them how to think creative and how to understand the right way to behave or not. We noticed some differences on the parent's opinions. We interviewed 45 parents, 15 parents thought that fairytales prevents their children must be reared with reality. They were afraid of imaginary friend their child. They thought that the fairytales wasn't too much important for the development of their children. They thought the tales was just a way of entertainment nothing else. The other part of the parents (30 parents) thought that the tales are important for the development of their children they used to have confidence in the work of the educators.

## **DISCUSSION**

The role of the fairy tales is very important for the social and psychological development of the child. We confirm this result due to the conclusions of our study. When interviewed, parents and educators stated that tales greatly influence the child development, that their role is irreplaceable in developing their imagination and forming them as individuals, and what is more important, in understanding the rules

and adapting them to the culture and rules of their country. We used the semi structured interviews because we thought it was an available method to find out the real opinions of both parents and educators. The samples we chose contains only one parent for each children of the kindergartens we observed. The samples number corresponds with the population of Vlora because our study refers only to this city.

We have decided to observe only two children to emphasize better the differences. Another reason for this method was the facility of the observation at home and the collaboration of the family. We observed the children for two months. The child who was grown up with tales resulted to have a more extrovert character than the child who had been rarely told tales. The first child showed better expression skills compared to the second. The first child had created interpersonal relations clearly on the basis of certain social norms as respect and reciprocity, whereas the second child had created such relations on the basis of a reference point, a relative or an acquaintance. The first child could more easily identify the group he belonged to and he could more clearly organize the basic notions of behaviour and understanding compared to the second child. We have arrived to these conclusions due to our observation and the help of the psychologists of the kindergartens. We used to observe them during they were playing with their friends, when they talk to each other, when they talk to their parents.

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parents was a bit different because he always used to stay with them but in the same time to disagree easier than the other child. The parents of this child used to think that he was a bit spoiled he used to stay better alone he was shame. The way the children solve their problem was different the first child who used to listened to the tales was more sure and have much more security in himself when he had to take any decision he was always clear in the rules he should respect. He used to have always the right arguments for his opinion and always used to discuss for his rights.

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