
MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE CURRENT SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Since “once upon the time” people from all parts of the world felt the need to sum up the wisdom they had acquired, and the ethical principles according to which they lived into fairy tales, narratives and fables. Each nation has developed its own tales, texts, which beside the universal verbalize also the special, or national, that which makes a group of people unique and therefore in the human mosaic also so precious. That is, why fairy tales from all parts of the world are a powerful tool for achieving multiculturalism. That is a reason, why they, although a little bit old fashioned, they may not disappear from the curricula of mother tongue education. They must be seen as a tool for encouraging the process of inculturation and the process of multiculturalism. The problem in this context could be the fact that fairy tales from different parts of the world differ from each other: a fairy tale from China, India or Africa differs from the European one. Is it possible that an European child comprehends the wisdom of the ethical message in the Chinese, Indian or African tale? In our presentation we wish to introduce the results of an empirical study on the reception of the African narrative. We were interested in that part of child’s literary reception, connected with the ethical component of the fairy tale, and in this connection we were interested, if a fairy tale from an other part of the world could be used as a tool for achieving a greater level of multiculturalism.

INTRODUCTION

For the experiment we had chosen a fairy tale in which the literary persons (carrier of the ethical message) were not the part of the horizon of expectations of the European child. Characters: a cayman, a jackal, a man

and wild animals from desert were connected in literary action, unused for our part of the world: A jackal was the carrier of positive ethical message, what is unused for fairy tales of our civilizational circle, where wolves are always doing bad things. And a man, who is in our literary experience an opposite character to wolf is in the African story a carrier of negative ethical message. And a Cayman is in the European experience unknown, as well the animals from desert- which means that they would not exist in the horizon of expectations of European child. All this was important, than according to the theory needs every reader some kind of experience in the receptive role with a particular literary type. This would make expect that while reading the cayman story European children would not be able to find their portal/door for identification and that they could not create imaginary-emotional presentations of the literary characters. They would also not be able to classify the literary characters into good and bad personalities. We would assume that they would not be able to perceive their role in the literary action or recognize the carriers of the ethical.

EXPERIMENT

Sample

We choose for the experiment a class of ten-year-old children.

Procedure

We read The story of Cayman from the book, the front page of which children could see, that it was an African FAIRY TALE).

After the reading we made it our task not to interpret the tale according to the classical interpretative method (in the framework of which we guide the child's attention toward the internal structure of the literary text and later on toward the neglected/missed signals of the aesthetic and ethical components).

This time we used the overhead projector to show the names of the places of action (in the form of titles) in the chronological order of the literary action and encouraged the children to describe what happened under each title.

After that we read the Story one more time and with the tools prepared for this purpose verified/determined the child's understanding of literary characters and with them connected ethical dimension of the text.

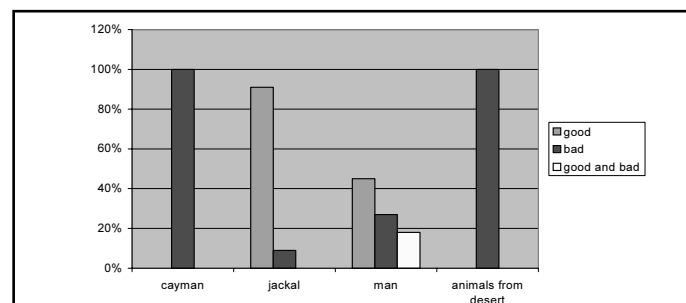
We used two tools:

1. A questionnaire with three tasks:

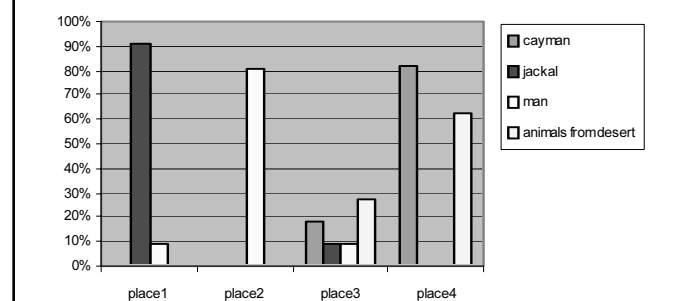
- we asked children to list the literary persons in to two groups: good and bad literary persons,
- they had to put literary characters on the scale from good to bad: on the first place the best person on the 4. place the person which is in their opinion the worst.
- they had to explain their decision. To tell, what did the literary character done, that they think, it is that good / that bad.

2. As a second tool were used productive literary didactics methods. We asked children to write four fairy tales. In this fairy tales, they should show, how the life of four literary characters went on on the next day.

Results:



Picture 1: Answers to the question what were the literary persons in the Story of Cayman like?



Picture 2: List the literary persons in the Story of Cayman from good to bad

100% of the children made the decision that the cayman is a BAD literary person. Their decision based on the fact that HE DID BAD to the MAN (despite the fact, that (as we will show later) they qualified the Man as a BAD literary person and despite their knowledge that the BAD literary persons must be punished for their begin bad in the structure of a proper fairy tale. Or, as they said: »He is bad, because he beet the man into the leg.«

91% of children felt that the jackal is a good literary person and all of them, who decided that way placed him on the 1. place on the scale from good to bad. 9% of children said the jackal is a bad literary person. Why did children think as they did? Let us take a closer look to their answers to the question »What in the story proofs, that you are right? Most of the children wrote: »He helped to the man.« And some others meant:

»He gave the cayman to the man for food.«

»He helped the man, so that the wouldn't kill him.«

»He punished the cayman.«

»He judged justly.«

And those children, who decided that the jackal is a bad literary person, based their decision on the fact that

»He said to the man, he should carry the cayman away.«

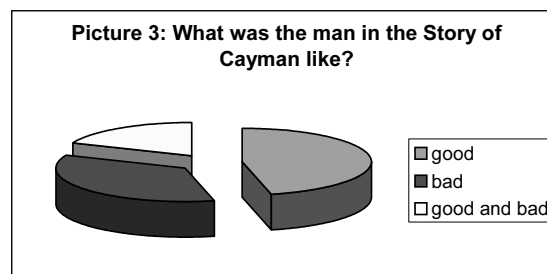
Obviously, this children had some difficulties to decide how jackal is. Their opinion was influenced by their expectation of HOW WOLFS ARE in the fairy tale in combination with their anthropocentric point of view:

In the tale the wolf (jackal) must be on the opposite side of the moral scale as the man. And as the man can't be bad (the consequence of anthropocentric point of view) he must be good. So: if the main is good – the wolf (jackal) must be bad.

But asked, why he thinks so, most of those children couldn't find the answer (they left an empty place in the table).

In the Story of Cayman the wolf is good. SO WHAT TO DO WITH THE MAN?

Children had with the placement of the man the most difficulties.



Because he does bad to the jackal, because he wants to save a life of his wife, which is the mother of children, the decision is really hard. And the result shows the confusion. That is why the decision about the character of the man (45% good, 34% bad, 18%) is so dispersed. In their fairy tale reception experience the man is almost always a good literary character. And to that comes the fact that in the Story of Cayman he is a father of children – which are the identification group of the readers. He can hardly be seen as a bad person.

The most difficulties had the children with the decision how are the animals from the desert

Animals are in the Story of Cayman the carrier of a special moral:

»You children of Adam are bad toward everybody who is good to you.«

and:

»Cayman, hold tight of what is yours and don't let it go!« they said in the Story.

In this case the moral is derived from the GENERAL THOUGHT (fact) how a human race treats nature as such.

And:

It is moral derived of a general character line of a man.

It is not a moral judgment, which can be made on the facts, seen in the Story of Cayman (and we know that children on the early stage of reception ability can recognize only those character lines of literary persons, which are developed in to the concrete (evident) picture (external action).

And the external action of the animals in the desert in this context is their speech:

»Cayman, hold tight the man. Don't let him go.«

So, how did the children decide: How are the animals in the Story of Cayman? They almost all placed them on the place 3 or 4 of the moral scale and they all decided, they are bad.

The second tool, we used, to monitor the capability of children to understand the ethical dimension of the story were productive literary-didactic methods. They gave us the opportunity to control, whether the child's verbal at direct questioning statement was, what he really felt and meant: So the question: is the label, the child gives to the literary person, the expression of his moral judgment (unconscious opinion) or is it the result of his general opinion, the verbalization of the function of particular literary person in his horizon of expectation (formed in the previous literary receptive experience)?

We checked the child's verbal statement (label), implied in the answer to the question »What is the literary person (Cayman, jackal, man, animals from the desert) in the Story of Cayman like?« with the role, this literary

person is involved in child's »Fairy tale that happened tomorrow«. In some empirical studies we have made before, we proved, that the child of 10 years KNOWS, that one of the most important roles of the fairy tale is, that good literary persons get the award for their goodness and that bad literary persons are punished for their being bad and doing badly in the fairy-tale worlds. We proved that all 10 years old children use this rule in their own fairy tales.

So: what do the Fairy tales that happened tomorrow tell about child's judgment of the moral of the literary person?

All children said THE CAYMAN is a BAD literary person.

What is the destiny of the Cayman in the fairy-tale that happened tomorrow:

Cayman on the next day

Cayman escaped in to the river. There were other crocodiles. There was the place where he belonged. Crocodiles were dying from hunger. They didn't eat anything for a year.

On one day they had luck. They caped a zebra.

The main crocodile was thinking: "The zebra is too small. It will not be enough for all of us. I must exclude one of us!"

And he excluded the Cayman, because he was the laziest crocodile from all. From then on Cayman was the enemy of the pack. And one day the crocodiles eat him for breakfast.

Conclusion: the results of literary didactic methods confirmed the results of direct questioning: all children decided Cayman is a bad literary person and all children created their fairy tales about what happen to the Cayman in the fairy world next day in the way, where the Cayman repeats the bad behavior (in the next action he acts badly) and he gets punishment for that.

Jackal

Let's repeat the results of direct questioning:

91% of children felt that jackal is a good literary person and all of those, who decided like that, placed him on the first place of moral scale: from good to bad.

9% said, he were a bad literary person and placed him on the third place of good moral scale.

And how are results of literary productive method which cheques the reception of moral dimension of literary person: jackal. Let us see a fairy tale, written by a child, which said the jackal is a bad literary person. His fairy tale proofs that he didn't felt quite like that. In his fairy tale there is no punishment for jackal: on the contrary: he manage to save himself.

Jackal was standing on the east. He was monitoring the man and his children. He knew, they were looking for him. They wanted to kill him. He was right, that he didn't trust them.

He was hiding and looking. He saw, the children were going away. They returned in to the village. The danger was now a little bit smaller. Suddenly the wind began to blow. He had luck. The wind was blowing from west to east. The nature was on his side. He knew, they can not get his smell now. He was standing there and thinking of people. He had lost his trust in to the Adam's people.

Later in the night, he saw the man entering his house. He stood up and came out of the bush.

We can see in fairy tale, that the child intuitively knows, who is the carrier of the moral in the Story of Cayman. He gives his Fairy tale on the next day such a setting, which reflects his internal moral judgment. The setting of story is following the general fairy tale rule: THE HARMONY OF ALL REALISATIONS: everybody gets, what he deserved. And in the Fairy tale the jackal did good and he has got good.

Man

Direct questioning didn't give us a clear answer about the reception of moral component of the literary person MAN in the Story of Cayman. Almost the half of children (45%) said the man in the story is good, a third (34%) said he would be bad and a fifth (18%) couldn't decide weather he is good or bad.

Can we expect more clearly picture about child's moral judgments of MAN in the Story of Cayman after reading the fairy tales Fairy tale of a MAN tomorrow?

Let us take a look to the Fairy tales, wrote by the children, who decided, the man is a good literary person.

A story of a man - Tommorrow

A man and his company were looking for jackal, but they didn't find him. He was not on the place, he promised, he would be. The man was

thinking about mallami: "How comes, that he didn't keep his word. He promised, he would be there.

Children asked the father, weather they could go home. They wanted to be with their sick mother. They suggested to the father to take dogs and to look after jackal with their help. Father agreed.

Coming home, children found their mother in bed. Mother asked them for hot tee. Children had the idea to cook the mother a warm soup. They killed one hen and prepared a light hen soup. Mother eat slowly the whole soup plate. The pain passed. Suddenly she felt life in her body again. Children were glad. They remembered father again. They were worried about him.

Late in the night father returned home. He was very tired and worried, because he didn't find jackal. Children made him very happy when they told him the news about the mother.

Discussion

Blaž, who wrote this story, decided, the man is a good literary person.

Nevertheless, in his fairy tale he does not trust his judgment completely: in the plot of his fairytale the man doesn't DO anything, we could se as a good action. The man is still hunting the jackal. On the opposite side, we have his children. They DO good things:

- They are worried about the mother and say, they want to be with her.
- They consider, how could they help her
- They do more, she is asking for: instead of tee, they decide to cook the soup (it is a custom in Slovenija to cook a strong hen soup to ill persons. People believe, this will strength them to fight against the illness)
- And even more: the old custom of strong soup is corrected in a new fashion: from adults talking and from advertisements children know, the light products are the healthy ones – so the children in the Bla's fairy tale give mother a light soup.

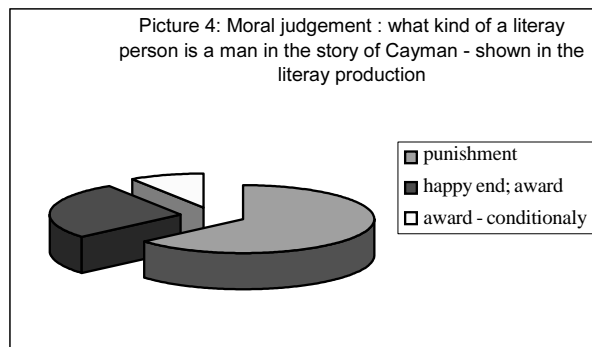
In his fairy tale Blaž shows, that he doesn't really trust the man. His children are the carrier of the moral. His children are those, who give away, what the man should have given away before: the hen. The hen shouldn't belong to the family any more. It was already promised for thank you for jackal fair judgment. And children (and Blaž!) intuitively know that. So it is only correct that the action scarifying the hen solves the problem about mother illness.

In Blaž's story a man doesn't get the award for his good behaving in the story. His life happily ever after is only a byproduct of good (moral) behaving of his children.

Conclusion

The fairy tale of a child, who answered the question about the moral qualities of man in the Story of Cayman with the word GOOD, show us, that we can not be sure, he meant literally, what he said. The action, the man is involved in the Fairy tale of a man on the next day shows, that he is not doing good things or (in an other story), if he is doing good things, it is the consequence of the miracle caused by a goof fairy. One of the fairy tales shows him at the end, forgetting even his wife, he was so much worried for and was prepared to kill a friend for her.

This opens the necessity of comparing he results of productive literary didactic methods with those, we have got after direct questioning after moral qualities of the literary person MAN in the Story of Cayman?.



The results in fig. 4 make us conclude that the judgment, as is it was shown in the productive process of producing a new fairy tale shows a much more developed ability of noticing and interpreting literary text signals connected with the ethical component of the literary person man in the Story of Cayman. Comparing the results shows that in the productive process 50% more children recognized the man in the Story is a carrier of a bad moral.

Animals from desert

All children decided after direct questioning animals from the desert were bad literary persons. Their decision was mad on the concrete level: "animals said to Cayman he should not leave the man. He should take, what belonged to him." So we should expect all the Fairy tales of animals in the desert tomorrow will show animals doing bad things and a punishment for that wrongdoing at the end. But this happened only partly: In less than a half (45%) of fairy tales animals are involved in literary action which shows their bad character. And of course in those fairy tales they get punishment at the end. In 10% of fairy tales children chose a bad ending for the animals, but they are clearly victims of the man.

But in half of fairy tales we can observe the happy end for the animals of the desert.

How is that possible?

Children who did that obviously detected the general trough behind the acting and speaking of animals in the desert in the Story of Cayman. They noticed and understood the statement: "You, children of Adam are bad toward everybody who is good to you!" And so the interpreted from this pint of view the next statement: "Cayman, hold tight of what is yours. Don't let it go."

Children understood that this two sentences in the story have to be understand as a sign for general trough: the man is usually not good to animals (nature). A man only in this concrete case (described in the Story of Cayman) acts unselfish. The man in the rule acts precisely like Cayman did in this particular case. So if animals say: don't let go, what is yours, this means only that animals acted, as in the fairy tale should be: **THEY JUDGED THE MAN AS A BAD CHARACTER, WHO DESERVES PUNISHMENT FOR HIS BAD (EGOISTIC) TREETING OF NATURE.** Man has a selfish nature. He thinks whole world belongs to him. And he understands himself as if he possessed nature and so can take everything of it, what he likes, what he needs and what makes him pleasure.

So if a half of children decide animals deserve for this acting (for this judgment) a life, happily ever after, they show us they understood the ethical component of a Story of Cayman on the abstract level.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt to conclude that even though African tales considerably differ from the bedtime stories read to Slovene children, and even though the development of the tale differs from the European one, and even despite the fact that the literary persons as the bearers of the ethical are

such that the European child has a hard time trying to imagine them, as he/she does not know them – despite all this the European child does comprehend the wisdom of the ethical message in the African tale.

The results of our empirical study on the reception of the African narrative shows that European children can understand the ethical component of the fairy tale from foreign civilisational circle. In this connection they prove that a fairy tale from an other part of the world could be used as a tool for achieving a greater level of multiculturalism in a curriculum of a current school.

And this means that fairy tales, stories, narratives and children's literature in general are altogether one of the few noble paths, along which young people from all parts of the world can get to know each other in order to learn to appreciate and respect each other.

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