

FAIRYTALE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This article aims to underscore the importance of multicultural convergence. It simultaneously explores and elaborates upon the various elements that facilitate the realization of this objective. The article discusses the pivotal role of language in fostering communication and identifying common ground to promote harmonious coexistence. Additionally, it underscores the significance of studying the factors that shape cultural diversity to promote mutual understanding and respect. At the pedagogical level, the article highlights the utilization of literature, particularly fairy tales, as a means to approach interculturalism. It delves into the concept of culture at both intercultural and multicultural levels. Furthermore, it expounds upon strategies for cultivating intercultural awareness and enhancing communication.

Keywords: interculturalism, intercultural communication, intercultural consciousness, fairy tales

ПРИКАЗКИ И ИНТЕРКУЛТУРНА КОМУНИКАЦИЯ

Апостолос Георгиу

Резюме: Настоящата статия има за цел да подчертае значението на интеркултурната комуникация. Тя едновременно проучва и разглежда различните елементи, които улесняват реализацията на тази цел. Статията обсъжда ключовата роля на езика за насърчаване на комуникацията и идентифициране на обща основа за насърчаване на хармоничното съжителство. Освен това, тя подчертава значението на изучаването на факторите, които формират културното многообразие, за насърчаване на взаимното разбирателство и уважение. На педагогическо ниво статията подчертава използването на литературата, по-специално приказките, като средство за подход към интеркултурализма. Тя се впуска в концепцията за култура както на интеркултурно, така и на мултикултурно ниво. Освен това разглежда стратегии за култивиране на интеркултурна осведоменост и подобряване на комуникацията.

Ключови думи: интеркултурализъм, интеркултурна комуникация, интеркултурно съзнание, приказки.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the centuries, population movements, whether individual or mass, have been a common occurrence influenced by various factors such as wars, economic shifts, and natural disasters. These migrations sometimes led to culturally diverse groups coexisting in many parts of the world for extended periods. The challenge in such coexistence has always been to foster harmony, mutual understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of differences. Achieving these objectives has required and continues to require a two-way exchange of knowledge that not only enables coexistence but also makes it mutually beneficial.

Language plays a crucial role in this equation, serving as a practical tool for communication and a conduit for transmitting knowledge about various cultural elements, including religion, morals, customs, history, and music. These elements, rather than erasing the concept of otherness, offer opportunities for individuals to recognize the multitude of commonalities that often outweigh differences (Sofronieva, 2015).

In the realm of values, concepts like mutual understanding, respect, reconciliation, acceptance, cooperation, and humanity are the essential assets that all parties involved must possess. However, in the educational sector, beyond the willingness of migrants, host countries must exert significant effort and implement comprehensive plans.

Language remains a critical element in facilitating intercultural coexistence, and ongoing efforts are dedicated to finding effective ways to address this challenge. Recent years have seen the emergence of various pedagogical practices aimed at promoting interculturalism. Two notable examples are the use of fairy tales as a means of transmitting knowledge and cultural elements and the incorporation of games as enjoyable and effective modes of communication.

The primary objective of this thesis is to foster and nurture students' intercultural consciousness through the use of fairy tales.

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INTERCULTURALISM

The term "interculturalism" primarily serves as a political concept that defines how a state or society, traditionally monocultural, grapples with the presence of one or more cultures breaking through its cultural boundaries (Auerheimer, 1990). Since the 1970s, it has come to represent the acceptance of distinct cultural communities, differing from the dominant population in areas such as culture, customs, language, and attitudes, often facilitated by state institutions or their own organizational structures.

Broadly speaking, multiculturalism encompasses pedagogical theories, political viewpoints, social perspectives, and targeted initiatives within regions where multiple cultural communities coexist (Auerheimer, 1990). However, it's important to note that the approach to interculturalism varies across different countries, especially in Western nations that, due to their economic prosperity, often serve as destinations for mobile groups.

In the United States, multiculturalism is not only legally enshrined but also ingrained in the consciousness of its citizens. The notion of a monocultural state is fundamentally foreign. The country comprises a multitude of groups, each maintaining their distinct identity while participating in the broader political landscape.

Australia and Canada also embrace multiculturalism, though they often emphasize elements that are palatable and non-disruptive to the dominant culture, particularly in areas related to fashion and cuisine.

Conversely, in older states where historical population movement has been limited, a stronger sense of homogeneity prevails. Coexistence becomes challenging and, when issues like attire, religion, and language surface, explosive. Assimilation may prove extremely difficult, as societies resist integrating mobile groups, asserting their authority in determining what they will tolerate, accept, or reject.

It's essential to acknowledge that mobile groups must also adapt to new cultural dynamics, often at odds with their own values. Perceptions may arise that host countries possess looser moral and family values, resulting in friction. Disparities in the treatment of women and religious practices can further exacerbate tensions. Educational issues, primarily language and moral values (Beleva, 2021), are difficult to address with equality and mutual understanding.

These challenges have dual consequences. Conflicts with local populations escalate, intensifying the difficulties of assimilation and cultural blending. On one hand, mobile populations may believe that their hosts should provide more without demanding cultural changes. On the other hand, mobile populations may perceive themselves as disadvantaged and isolated, believing the host culture to be superior, making it painful and difficult for them to assimilate.

To navigate these difficulties and promote coexistence in multicultural societies, states often implement measures and policies that encourage or even mandate better and fairer conditions. This may include language learning programs and the translation of educational materials into native languages. Cultural, familial, and religious differences are considered in these efforts. Special legislation is also enacted to combat discrimination, professional exclusion, and participation in local institutions or activities. Observatories oversee and collaborate with mobile populations to ensure their integration.

It's worth noting that multiculturalism, as practiced in different states, has garnered both praise and criticism. Critics argue that it can reinforce prejudices, foster stereotypes, fail to address the root causes of discrimination, subject

groups to constant social scrutiny, and ultimately create divisions due to the imposition of measures (Georgoiannis, 2009).

Finally, it's important to distinguish interculturalism from multiculturalism. Interculturality is often seen as the result of multiculturalism, emerging after intercultural friction (Damanakis, 1997), on the other hand, posits that interculturality emerges from the convergence of both sides in the host country, representing the result of bilateral assimilation.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

Individuals tasked with facilitating the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures at an intercultural or multicultural level undoubtedly encounter numerous difficulties and challenges. Intercultural consciousness, a pivotal determinant of successful reconciliation, necessitates a predisposition to grasp and embrace the reality that such convergence demands substantial effort and persistence.

To cultivate intercultural awareness effectively, it is paramount to possess a deep understanding of the cultures of other individuals and groups. However, acquiring a comprehensive understanding of a culture is often an elusive endeavor. Cultures are in a constant state of flux, influenced by new factors and undergoing mutations, rendering complete comprehension a formidable task. The most prudent approach, given the inherent complexities, involves embracing the culture of others and engaging in ongoing processes of communication and reconciliation.

Byram (2002) identifies three essential elements that characterize effective intercultural awareness. The first element pertains to understanding values and behaviors without resorting to comparative judgments. Instead, success lies in delving into another culture by observing and analyzing it from its own perspective, rather than imposing one's own viewpoint. The second element involves keenly observing how social groups function within a given culture. The third element involves the ability to identify ideas, events, and traits that might lead to misunderstandings in communication between two or more cultures. Byram underscores the significance of these components in the context of foreign language instruction, emphasizing that teachers should convey cultural knowledge through feedback, particularly regarding the functioning and characteristics of social groups. Such aspects encompass geographical location, the prevalence and significance of local narratives, and achievements in intellectual, scientific, and even athletic spheres.

While some elements affecting language instruction can be molded into a structured framework, others demand a more personalized consideration of the situation. These include family dynamics, religious practices, and other daily social interactions (Simeonidou - Christidou, 1997).

Taken together, these factors underscore that effective and comprehensive intercultural awareness necessitates a broad spectrum of knowledge and actions. Achieving this goal requires not only knowledge and skills but also an acknowledgment that this process is demanding, prolonged, and certainly

time-intensive.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH LITERATURE

It is widely recognized that literature, with its diverse array of expressive forms and genres, plays a crucial role in nurturing and enhancing various skills, particularly linguistic proficiency. Literature, and notably the genre of fairy tales, holds a special and cherished place for students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This is especially true when it comes to fostering understanding and respect for cultural differences and promoting deeper knowledge.

For children from minority backgrounds, the benefits are manifold. These children are provided with a multifaceted experience. Through literature, they come into contact with their cultural heritage and ancestral roots, fostering a sense of pride and preventing them from feeling detached from their cultural milieu. Furthermore, it encourages them to strengthen and develop their connection with the values and beliefs of their respective communities (Griva-Semoglou, 2013).

Fairy tales that incorporate multicultural elements hold particular significance in helping children from host countries gain a better understanding of other cultures. Children come to realize that despite the diverse cultural origins of their peers, there exist many commonalities, such as shared emotions, daily needs, similar aspirations, and a mutual desire to coexist and grow. The essence of harmonious relationships takes center stage. Additionally, as Norton (2006) suggests, these tales offer a pleasant and interdisciplinary approach to enhancing children's encyclopedic knowledge, touching upon subjects like History, Physics, and Geography.

Specifically, these tales impart historical knowledge, often of global importance, introduce noteworthy individuals and historical landmarks, and provide insights into climatic conditions, fauna, flora, dietary preferences, religious practices, and linguistic elements. Ultimately, they enable children to embark on mental journeys to the natural environments of their peers, turning them into explorers and researchers in their own right. These elements might otherwise fail to pique their interest or might lead to misguided perceptions in the pursuit of cultural convergence.

FAIRY TALES AND CULTURE

In contemporary times, the concept of a fairy tale has become closely associated with enchanting narratives set in magical realms, featuring conversing animals and plants, primarily crafted to delight young listeners. However, as underscored by Malafantis (2011), throughout history, fairy tales have served as vehicles of solace, motivation, and instruction.

Fairy tales provide a unique gateway to acquainting ourselves with foreign lands and cultures, thanks to the frequent inclusion of diverse cultural elements within them. In today's world, shaped by modern perceptions and technological

advancements, there exists not only a demand for an enjoyable literary genre like the fairy tale to facilitate cross-cultural comprehension but also a recognition of its role within the realm of education. Young readers absorb valuable experiences and develop aspirations for a better life. They begin to challenge stereotypes while simultaneously embracing diversity. Most importantly, they come to realize that our world has always been and continues to be a rich tapestry where every culture contributes its unique imprint (Manna-Brodie, 1992).

Hazel Rochman (1993) contends that fairy tales enable individuals to break free from the notion that a singular culture prevails, fostering an understanding of other cultures devoid of prejudgment. Simultaneously, the celebration of diversity, as exemplified in fairy tales, transforms from an obligation into a fundamental right (Konstantopoulou, 2000). Surprisingly, even those fairy tales with a multicultural perspective, though they may not initially appear to do so, fortify national self-awareness in numerous ways. Through their interactions with other cultures, children learn to appreciate the distinctive traits of both foreign peoples and their own heritage. Encouraging a critical examination of values can further bolster their appreciation of their own culture. Additionally, these tales facilitate the promotion of cultural coexistence through mutual respect and understanding. Ultimately, children gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF FAIRY TALES

As previously mentioned, the fairy tale stands as an exceptionally valuable tool within the educational community, despite being underutilized by some educators. Its influence spans a multitude of areas and functions, leaving a profound impact. It notably enhances various cognitive functions, including memory, perception, and imagination, facilitating a smoother transition into the complexities of real life. Furthermore, it serves as a mechanism for addressing internal dilemmas and as a means of stimulating memory and intellect (Bettelheim, 1976).

Moreover, it renders knowledge more enticing and comprehensible. Within the enchanting realm of the fairy tale, creative knowledge finds expression, harnessing all forms of intelligence, in alignment with Gardner's theory. This multifaceted approach empowers children to cultivate their character and develop a wide array of skills.

Self-definition and the ability to identify with characters and settings represent additional benefits of engaging with fairy tales (Bruner, 1986). It's crucial to underscore the role of fairy tales in creating a secure and open framework during the learning process. When conveyed through the captivating charm of a fairy tale within imaginary worlds, knowledge and creative endeavors become more readily embraced. This is particularly true when presented in a playful and interactive manner, fostering smart activities. Simultaneously, through dramatization and children's active participation, their expression and

vocabulary are honed, both in their native tongue and in fields that promote diverse viewpoints. Children are also introduced to the world of art in all its forms, nurturing their aesthetic sensibilities. Lastly, fairy tales offer a pathway to acquire specialized knowledge such as grammar and history, all the while reinforcing both spoken and written language (Dulia, 2010).

Fairy tales imbue students with the ability to perceive symbols, images, and meanings. Frequently, children identify with the heroes of these tales, a significant facet as the central aim of a fairy tale, aside from providing pleasure, is to instill a sense of justice and morality—concepts generally understood by children who ultimately wish for these principles to prevail. In this way, storytelling guides children through a process of moral reasoning (Salmond, 2006).

Therefore, it becomes crucial for fairy tales to be incorporated into the school curriculum, either as an independent subject or as an additional component within existing subjects like Language and History. Innovative approaches, such as inclusion in the Flexible Zone or Environmental Education initiatives, should also be explored to ensure that the educational potential of fairy tales is fully harnessed (Meraklis, 1999).

THE FAIRY TALE AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOLS

The fairy tale has long been recognized as a prominent educational and pedagogical tool, enjoying widespread acknowledgment for its multifaceted contributions to children's language development, moral grounding, knowledge transmission, and, not least, as an exceptional source of entertainment. In the words of Swiss scholar Luthi, the fairy tale serves as a mirror reflecting both our existence and our potential (Anagnostopoulos, 1997).

Recent global demographic shifts have underscored the need for educational tools and programs that facilitate cultural convergence. Especially for young students, fairy tales, as an integral part of children's literature, play a pivotal role and enjoy universal acceptance. They excel in fostering respect and cultural awareness, and on a broader scale, in highlighting the shared characteristics of diverse cultures (Norton, 2007). As Sakellariou notes, one of literature's fundamental roles is to promote and cultivate cooperation, sociability, peace among nations, and the belief in the equality of all people (Sakellariou, 2009). Additionally, literature contributes significantly to enriching a child's vocabulary, nurturing psycho-spiritual growth, enhancing socialization, fostering imagination (Beleva, 2018), critical thinking, and cultural literacy (Govaris, 2013).

Fairy tales, in particular, hold a catalytic role in facilitating communication between different cultures, promoting tolerance for differences. Their educational value spans various domains, primarily by serving as a bridge connecting disparate cultures. This is achieved by identifying common elements crucial for human existence, such as material possessions, daily activities, spiritual pursuits, and emotional needs.

The recognition of these shared elements and their continual interplay reinforces the idea that humans are not isolated entities but integral components of a diverse and interconnected world (Moussiu, 2001, as cited in Antoniogianni, 2014).

The teaching of literature must form an integral part of an educational process aimed at shaping and embracing cultural identity while respecting diversity (Paparousi, 2005). Intercultural literature, aligning with contemporary needs, explores the concept of otherness and guides child readers towards acceptance of the Other (Tsilimeni, 2003). For Papadatos (2012), intercultural literature encompasses all books that feature heroes from different nationalities and explore the relationships they form, emphasizing intercultural contact and interaction, fostering connections, solidarity, dialogue, cross-cultural communication, and respect for differences. Through literature and related activities like dramatization and role-plays, students engage in a process extending beyond monocultural boundaries, becoming "active receivers" of an intercultural experience characterized by intertwined relationships, mutual understanding, and respect for diversity (Papadatos, 2012).

Fairy tales, particularly folk tales, serve as a means of preserving a people's cultural heritage and a source of knowledge. They serve as a bridge between the present and the past, bridging the gap between contemporary events and history. While fairy tales have evolved over time, taking on new, often independent narratives, they retain elements like characters, events, and motifs, thereby establishing a connection between tradition and modern reality. In essence, they adapt and evolve to fit different contexts, ensuring their continued relevance as educational and entertainment mediums. The language used in fairy tales also plays a significant role in communication. The language should convey a desire for understanding and unity (Sofronieva, 2012). To achieve this, the language must be universal, subtly unifying while simultaneously accommodating differences, thereby respecting cultural diversity (Kaplanoglou, 2009, as cited in Bausinger, 2009).

Hence, it is evident why fairy tales, both in Europe and across the globe, are regarded as a primary educational tool for fostering multicultural awareness. Fairy tales, presented in their unique manner, foster an environment of interaction and co-creation, all the while stimulating the imagination and improving comprehension skills while developing oral language. In essence, they serve as a medium that enhances communication and bridges cultural divides (Griva-Kostelidou, 2012, as cited in Griva and Lazaridou, 2014).

The achievement of fairy tale objectives, primarily knowledge and entertainment, exerts a profound impact on the relationships among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The elements conveyed through these tales contribute to a more harmonious and creative school environment. Simultaneously, they create conditions for enhancing interpersonal relationships and discovering common ground among students. In other words, fairy tales

promote understanding and mutual respect while cultivating interest in the new and different.

COMMUNICATION IN INTERCULTURAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Communication in intercultural and cross-cultural contexts presents numerous challenges, particularly in today's technologically advanced society. These challenges encompass both social issues when dealing with groups and interpersonal challenges when addressing individuals.

Communication within a culture is a two-way process, where individuals actively engage, creating dynamic relationships. This active role makes communication a crucial variable in cultural interactions among different groups. According to Banks (2000), cultural environments encompass verbal and nonverbal communication, which includes behaviors, language, values, and skills taught through education.

In a broader sense, communication involves constructing, understanding, and using symbols and information, both verbally and non-verbally, to shape behavior. It is influenced by emotional factors, moral values, life attitudes, and established goals. Perceptions of others and personal experiences also play vital roles in shaping communication. Therefore, it involves the comparison of behaviors and motivations that influence an individual's intentions (Searle, 1999).

Effective communication requires a sender and a receiver, with successful transmission occurring when the receiver interprets messages accurately. Vocal elements such as tone, intensity, fluctuations, and speech speed are essential components that can enhance communicative intentionality (Papadakis - Michaelidis, 1996).

Communication is a complex interplay of society, culture, and personality, all crucial elements for intercultural communication (Bolten, 1993). Multiple fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, politics, education, technology, and linguistics, must address the challenges of intercultural communication (Nicolaou, 2005).

Cross-cultural issues often create tensions, and effective communication can mitigate these consequences. Cultural education can facilitate the equal interaction of different cultures, remove obstacles, and foster cultural enrichment through mutual exchange (Hohmann, 1989). However, communication does not always yield the desired results, as successful communication hinges on the accurate and understandable use of language. Many organizations and states, such as the European Union through programs like Socrates - Comenius, prioritize the continuous education of mobile groups, especially children, to combat discrimination and xenophobia (Socrates Program, 1997-2000).

Schools play a pivotal role in addressing communication challenges arising from the coexistence of culturally diverse groups. Educational institutions must

offer equal learning opportunities and create conditions that promote inclusivity, regardless of students' backgrounds (Engels-Kritidis, 2022; Kapetanidou, 1996). However, various obstacles, including existing barriers within host communities and incomplete teacher training, can complicate these efforts. Attempting to eliminate differences can sometimes lead to unintended consequences, and inherent aggression among children can exacerbate conflicts (Tsiakalos, 1982).

CONCLUSIONS

The fairy tale serves as an accessible tool for children to engage with and understand other cultures within the framework of the intercultural approach. The primary objective of the intercultural approach is to foster equal opportunities in education and society, achieved through organized efforts to combat stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and discrimination.

Utilizing fairy tales in the educational process offers multiple benefits to students of all ages. Through storytelling, analysis, and retelling, students can learn, practice, and enhance various skills. Importantly, these activities occur in a playful and enjoyable environment, creating a positive educational experience for children.

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