



Contribution of the Use of Children's Literature in Special Education

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Received: 6 October 2022 ▪ Revised: 17 December 2022 ▪ Accepted: 20 December 2022

Abstract

This article examines the benefits that the use of children's literature can bring to Special Education. Children's literature can provide significant benefits to students by providing role models and values as well as enhancing their cognitive development. This applies to all children with the exception of those who face special educational needs and are included in special education. The benefits of children's literature are as much cognitive and academic as they are emotional and social. Children's literature can be an important means of encouraging and motivating students studying in Special Education and at the same time contribute to the development of their skills and abilities because of the perspectives and opportunities it creates.

Keywords: special education, children's literature, education.

1. Introduction

Special Education aims to contribute so that students with special educational needs and disabilities can develop comprehensively and harmoniously both educationally and on a personality level. The philosophy of Special Education does not focus on the problems and difficulties faced by the students who participate in it, but instead on their potential, trying to utilize them to achieve their effective development. In this context, various means and knowledge objects are used such as that of children's literature which is examined in this article in an attempt to articulate its positive benefits in its use in Special Education.

2. The value of children's literature

The value of children's literature is not in doubt. From an early age, children come into contact with the artistic language and are introduced to it. The use of children's literature early in the child's life is done in order to develop and strengthen his imagination, to shape his personality and also to develop aesthetically and linguistically.

Children's literature is used from a very early age in the child's education, and especially short illustrated stories that are easier to follow in order to have cognitive as well as aesthetic benefits. Commonly used in preschool, these stories increase children's vocabulary while being enjoyable (Robinson & Spodek, 1965). Parents read from a very early age to their children such as fairy tales and other literary stories. In this way, children acquire skills that help them adapt better when they enter primary education. Children who are introduced to children's literature from an early age when they enter education have enhanced narrative skills compared to those who do not have such experiences. For example, children who have been exposed to children's literature may connect the effect with the cause while making more correct use of subordinate clauses.

However, the contribution of children's literature to children's development is not only cognitive but also moral. Children's contact with children's literature exposes them to important patterns that help shape their behaviors. This is important since their character during childhood is malleable. Literature in general develops a relationship with each reader depending on the time. For children, however, literature has other dimensions as it can provide them with entertainment while also contributing to their education (Papadatos, 2009).

Children's literature has a privileged position for the development of children since it can offer them knowledge but also emotion through their aesthetic effect (Iakos, 1989). Knowledge becomes easier and understandable for children through literature and consequently its application is better. In this way, children's creativity is enhanced, but also their ingenuity, which is important not only for their academic performance and adaptation, but also for dealing with their everyday life effectively (Agoura, 2017).

In children's literature children see characters who react and act in a certain way. When they themselves face problems and difficulties in their everyday life they can act and react according to the standards they have received through literature. In addition, when the child identifies with the literary characters, he can better understand his own feelings and those of others and what they are experiencing. The behavior of these characters can contribute so that children can face their own difficulties by creating alternative solutions that they experience fictitiously through these stories (Karpozilou, 2000).

Literary stories give children the opportunity not only to overcome the difficulties they face but to manage even situations that are difficult and traumatic. The literary story, as long as it is good, can help the child to clarify what he feels as well as to strengthen self-confidence. In this way, children's literature also strengthens children's self-esteem. The skills and abilities offered by children's literature not only enhance children's personal development but also the relationships they form with others. By understanding the feelings of others through the behaviors of the characters, they understand what they themselves should observe in relationships with their siblings, their parents, their friends and others. They also understand the impulsive behaviors they may face from their peers which are emotional and not explained by logic (Karpozilou, 2000).

From the above it is clear that children's literature has important dimensions and aspects. In addition, its benefits, in addition to the cognitive and emotional ones already mentioned, are also social. Through children's literature, children can understand the expectations of their gender and the role they are expected to play. At the same time, in recent years, children's literature approaches important social issues and topics such as that of diversity

and the attitudes that others must maintain towards it, both socially and morally (Papantonakis, 2013).

The benefits that children's literature offers in all areas of children's development also justify their inclusion in formal education. Children's literature transforms the educational process into an active one by allowing students to have an essential role in it and not just be passive receivers of the knowledge that is conveyed to them. However, the use of children's literature in the context of education is not easy since it is not limited to its classical function. This means that the teacher must provide motivation to the students and this requires the appropriate presentation of a text of children's literature in such a way that the child wants to listen to it, read it and work with it. At the same time, the text of children's literature can be used in such a way as to develop research activities and discussions combined with the intellectual search that can lead students (Tsiledaki, 2016).

3. Children's literature and special education

Children's literature, as already mentioned, can strengthen the education of children by promoting diversity, resulting in their familiarity with it. Children's literature is an important tool for children to form from an early age positive attitudes towards diversity, including disability, making it valuable for Special Education.

Diversity is a theme that has strongly occupied the field of literature. Through literature, people with disabilities have been portrayed many times, although not always in the same way. The literary portrayal of people with disabilities depended to a significant extent on the social perceptions that existed about them. However, an effort was always made to give weight to other dimensions beyond any visible disabilities that may have been present. One such example was the kindness of Quasimodo in "Our Lady of Paris" by B. Hugo. The social discredit and sometimes exploitation of people with disabilities is strongly reflected in Karkavitsa's play "The Beggar" where the hero makes his child disabled by himself in order to exploit him financially through the pity he causes (Kapoussi et al., 2010).

The presence of characters with disabilities in literature is not a modern phenomenon since such cases can be traced back to the 19th century. At that time, people with disabilities were treated with pity while their condition was seen as a result of their own bad behavior, i.e., a kind of "punishment". But in the 20th century, the unfair treatment of people with disabilities was frowned upon, with the result that their presentation in literature also changed. Until the First World War, however, people with disabilities were projected in a stereotypical way, that of villains who usually chased heroes like Peter Pan who was chased by Captain Hook (Karga, 2008).

While in the rest of the world, people with disabilities became literary heroes, despite their stereotypical portrayal, in Greece the first book only appeared in the 80s and specifically in 1986. In recent decades, however, a large part of children's literature deals with disability, through a realistic approach (Papadatos, 2009).

Children with disabilities in children's literature are presented in a certain way. First of all, if they do not represent the heroes of the children's story, which usually happens, their role is central. In addition, the environment that moves around him is focused on the child with special needs and his well-being. The characteristics of the disabled child are positive and the abilities they have are particularly emphasized, while the difficulties and problems are recorded realistically but simply. The child with a disability as a hero can be socially isolated but can also be fully included in it and integrated (Kanatsouli, 2008).

The use of such literary texts in Special Education can offer significant benefits. Children's literature, regardless of the individual differences that may exist, works pedagogically

in a way that evokes the reader’s respect for disability. Also, there is the possibility that the child who is a reader of literature may also have a disability. Thus, it aims to raise awareness in order for attitudes towards disability to be positive and to accept it (Doulami & Antoniou, 2011).

Children’s literature can create significant influence for the child with a disability. Its use by the special educator can help to strengthen the self-confidence of children with disabilities and encourage them in their efforts to adapt. Seeing a hero with disabilities, the child can identify with him since he too may have faced difficulties, isolation or rejection. Also, he can identify with the hero’s strength and consider that he also has it and gain more optimistic perspectives. Like the hero, they most likely want to try to fight and overcome the difficulties they face. Children’s literature can help children with disabilities to accept their difference but as a disadvantage. At the same time, as with other children, children’s literature can contribute to strengthening their imagination, their language and social skills, their emotional intelligence and other things that are necessary for their adaptation and development (Doulami & Antoniou, 2011).

4. Future research directions

Children’s literature can contribute, as was evident in its theoretical approach, to the all-round development of children with disabilities attending Special Education. For the documentation of the theoretical framework, however, research support is also needed. In this context, it would contribute to the knowledge that exists on the specific subject to investigate the opinions of special educators and also of the students themselves who study in Special Education on the role of children’s literature as well as the effects it can bring.

5. Conclusion

Children’s literature can contribute to the acceptance and understanding of disability. But this does not only apply to the general public but also to students with disabilities. Using children’s literature with disabled characters can help children understand that they are not alone and that there are others who face the same difficulties as them. Literary heroes can be role models in order to struggle and try to face their difficulties and fully integrate into society. At the same time, it contributes to the development of their skills in a creative and enjoyable way.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The authors declare no competing interests.

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