Chapter #2

CREATING CONTEMPORARY PICTURE SHORT STORIES USING INTERTEXTUAL HEROES AND PLOT SUBVERSION
An empirical research

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present research is to explore the extent to which preschoolers are able to recognize intertextual connections and schemata and build upon them by subverting the plot of classic tales. According to previous findings, children in preschool age are able to acknowledge familiar plots and reproduce the basic narrative structure using pictures as a source. Providing that during preschool age, narrative skill establishes the grounds for narrative comprehension and literacy emergence, it is highly important to examine the potential of the narrative skill. For the purposes of this empirical research, a teaching intervention is conducted with a sample composed of preschoolers from two public Greek kindergartens. The preschoolers' performance is evaluated through context analysis. The interpretation of expression patterns identified in preschoolers' produced narrative speech shows that they are able to introduce familiar fairytale characters into their posterior narratives attributing to them distinctive roles. Furthermore, they are able not only to distinguish fairytale patterns, but also to subvert them by narrating a different sequence of events. The present research contributes to the discussion regarding the extent to which narrative skill could be developed during early childhood. Based on the results, narrative skill can be enriched through the combined use of intertextual connections and patterns subversion.

Keywords: picture short story, intertextual hero, plot subversion, teaching intervention, empirical research, early childhood education.

1. INTRODUCTION

During preschool age, narrative skill plays a fundamental role in the evolution of the self while it establishes the grounds for narrative comprehension and literacy emergence (Whitehead, 2010). The development of narrative skill leads children's informal, verbal interactions to formally structured written communication patterns (Gamble & Yates, 2008). It is a fact nowadays that the child's ability to acknowledge specific narrative structures and to finally recognize the terms and conditions of reading them, has become one of the objectives in the recent field studies. To what extent the potential of the narrative skill can be developed in early age is a question of substantial importance. Thus, this research aims to explore the extent to which particular narrative elements can be used in combinatorial synthesis in narrative speech in order to produce contemporary narratives. Subsequently, this paper discusses whether the differentiation in narrative speech after the use of combined narrative elements leads to a notable development of narrative skill.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Preschoolers as narrators

Oral narratives (storytelling, story retelling, story generation) are an essential part of the academic and social interactions of school-aged children (Crais & Lorch, 1994). Studies have suggested that retelling significantly improves children's story comprehension, remembering of story information, sense of story structure, and oral language complexity (John, Lui, &Tannock, 2003; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Morrow 1985). Direct teaching of the story parts can improve not only children's understanding of the language arts, but especially their readiness for reading. Therefore, incorporating the storytelling and retelling process into the kindergarten schedule is a practical as well as developmentally appropriate means so as several academic subjects to be taught and skills to be mastered at this beginning level (George-Remy, 1991).

Children are narrators by nature. Although most people develop their ability to narrate through apprenticeship in their everyday life, its communicable value is noticeable by educational research. Narration has been considered as a primitive educational medium, not only in language lessons but in other subjects as well (Stadler & Ward, 2005). When the narrator is a child, some issues are examined differently. Children need something to trigger their interest and motivate them to create their own stories. Specifically in kindergarten, there are several ways of facilitating story fabrication by children: by posing hypothetical questions, by using images as a guide, by distortion of words which can transform them into productive initiation points of a story, by altering the content of existing, well known stories or by simply adding an "afterwards" part to them, by improvising a story with no title. The aforementioned approaches mainly aim at enhancing children's imagination and trigger the story creation process by providing an initial point for the story plot and/or one or more initial characters. It is a fact that children at this age are often not able to write, but they are able to create stories on their own (Papanikolaou & Tsilimeni, 1992).

2.2. The type of contemporary picture short story

One of the most recent studies (Kalaitzi, 2018) identifies contemporary picture short story as a literary type which includes the fairytale narrative framing, the narrative basic structure, intertextual characters, subversion of the fairytale plot and picture-text interaction. The short length and the dyadic mode of this type, which transfers the meaning through both the image and the narration, not only meets the needs and the level of competency of early stages, but it could also enable its comprehension and reproduction by preschoolers.

2.3. Relevant research
2.3.1. Previous research on the generation of narratives in early stages

According to several studies (John et al., 2003; Morrow, 1985; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Applebee, 1978/1973) changes emerge in the child's personal narrative voice. Five-year-olds tell temporally organized stories, and knowledge of narrative structure begins to emerge at this age. Children from ages four to six tend to include beginnings, settings, and outcomes in their stories; and, between the ages of six and eleven years, children's reporting of internal responses of the characters improves. Tompkins, Guo, and Justice (2012) examined the relationship between inference making while narrating a wordless book and story comprehension of a storybook in four to five-year olds. The results show that children make three types of inferences, which are significantly related to story comprehension -characters goals, actions that achieved those goals, and character states. Another recent research

conducted by Silva, Strassser, and Cain (2014) in preschoolers showed that questions based on the wordless picturebook can scaffold the production of more coherent narratives at that stage.

In Sipe's (2001) study conducted in first- and second-grade classroom of twenty children in an urban elementary school in a large eastern city, students responded to readalouds of variants (constituting a text set) of a classic tale. Seven types of intertextual connections were identified: children express personal familiarity with the text or textual features (recognition) and they personalize the story, projecting personal experience(s) onto the story (empathy/personal critique). They, also, connect the language of one text with the language of another text (language) as well as plot details, characters, etc. of one text to those of another -using these connections to make predictions (story). They connect illustration(s) of one text with illustration(s) from another (illustrations), texts within a genre ("They all…") and they suggest alternative plots, based on an understanding of a particular genre, or express preferences (alternatives/ preferences). Based on the findings, Sipe suggested a theoretical model regarding/referring to young children's schema building for traditional stories. According to that, children build story schemata in the following ways: (a) by personalizing the story, recognizing their familiarity with it, expressing empathy for the story characters, or inserting their own opinions based on their life experiences, (b) by making connections to other stories (and other discrete arrays of signs) and/or between illustrations and other visual features -in picturebooks-, at the level of the specific language of the story and the plot sequence, (c) by analyzing the story, understanding the function of characters, the plot sequence, the setting, and the other narrative elements by "close reading".

2.3.2. The current research case

A question of whether preschoolers are able to recognize intertextual connections and schemata and build upon them by subverting the plot of classic tales is explored in this particular research. Taking into account the previous studies presented above, it is preschoolers who are able to acknowledge familiar plots and reproduce the basic narrative structure using pictures as a source, and it is first graders who make intertextual connections among texts and among pictures, recognize schemata or patterns and are able to suggest alternative plots. Given that, there is no study undertaken showing that preschoolers are able to make intertextual connections and schema/plot subversions in their own produced variants of tales. Therefore the questions of this particular research are (1) whether preschoolers are able to use characters from earlier texts in their own narratives, (2) whether they are able to subvert the plot sequence and (3) to what extent they are able to combine the two narrative elements of intertextual hero and plot subversion to produce their own tale variants suited to the type of picture short story.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research approach and sampling

The particular empirical research included the observation of the population sample during their participation in a teaching intervention conducted within a six month period. Two Greek public kindergartens were selected for sampling on the basis of social equivalence and cultural parity (Malec, Stagg-Peterson, & Elshereif, 2017; Nasir, Naqvi, & Bhamani, 2013). The sample consisted of thirty four preschoolers of typical development, between the age of five and six and a half years old, since at this age their narrative skill is developed radically into distinctive developmental stages enabling the comprehension and generation of specific structural and morphological narrative elements (Morrow, 1985; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Applebee, 1978/1973).

3.2. Data collection tool

Focus group was chosen as a data collection tool. Preschoolers were divided into small groups of three or four members and produced narrative speech while interacting with each other. Focus groups enabled the interplay among children, the constructive influence and the exchange of prior knowledge and experience concerning familiar fairytale characters and patterns. Focus group methodology enabled a better observation of the process of narrative production in action. Each group's narratives were recorded and transcribed by the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998).

3.3. Teaching intervention

The intervention, which was designed especially for the purposes of the present research, was based on the objectives of the Greek New Curriculum (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014), concerning the learning area of language, which sets as goal – among others- the oral production of stories. The design and the order of the activities' implementation was based on the principles of constructivism applied in Early Childhood Curriculum, which attributes a fundamental role to active, constructive and playful learning (DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002). Preschoolers participated either in pairs or in groups in fairytale board games, story puzzles and plot cubes games, all of which formed activities repeated as many times as needed in order for every preschooler to produce narrative speech. All students build on their prior knowledge which included the identification and reproduction of the narrative basic structure (Silva et al., 2014; Morrow, 1985; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Applebee, 1978/1973). Given that, the first phase of the program, aiming at the comprehension and use of the intertextual hero, included four activities in which preschoolers tried to discern the different roles of fairytale characters, to identify intertextual heroes in fairytales, to introduce fairytale characters into different stories, and to retell basic fairytale structures including intertextual heroes. After preschoolers had comprehended and used intertextual characters into familiar tales, the second phase followed, aiming at the comprehension and use of the plot subversion caused by the introduction of a new character. Likewise, it also included four activities in which preschoolers tried to distinguish a fairytale pattern/schema, to identify reversals of the good and the villain character, to subvert the fairytale pattern/schema, and to reverse both the characters' action and the chronological sequence of events. In Table 1, the title and a short description of each activity are presented.

3.4. Context analysis of preschoolers' narrative speech

Preschoolers' performance was evaluated through context analysis of their narrative speech, on the basis that this qualitative approach treats data as representations of text, image, expression, subject or rhetorical patterns created to be identified, analyzed and interpreted by the researcher's personal judgment (Huckin, 2004). Specific expression patterns (Tables 1, 2 & 3) were set before the implementation of the intervention in order to form the data for identification, analysis and interpretation by the researcher. In particular, the clear and concise reference to a familiar fairytale character -introduced to a posterior narrative adopting the discrete role of either deus ex machina or the villain- was identified as the narrative element of the intertextual hero. Similarly, the reversal of the familiar patterns of classic fairytales was identified as the narrative element of the plot subversion under the condition that the change of pattern leads to the subversion of the plot. The last expression pattern set was about the reference of a familiar fairytale character whose introduction causes a new sequence of events. This was identified as the combined use of both narrative elements.

All data collected were interpreted as representations of text and image and the above expression patterns were analyzed as indicators of the narrative elements of the intertextual hero and the plot subversion detected in both the picture created and the text produced. Preschoolers' narrative speech that was produced during the intervention was audiotaped and transcribed. For the purposes of this article a small token of the narrative speech transcripts was translated and adapted from Greek to English language by the researcher. Both the examples of narrative speech and the identified expression patterns are included in Tables 1-3.

Table 1.
Expression patterns of the Intertextual Hero narrative element identified in preschoolers' narrative speech during the teaching intervention.

Narrative	Expression pattern	Activity Description	Example of narrative speech	Expression pattern identified
		DEUS EX MACHINA VS VILLAIN: Preschoolers categorize into a dashboard images of fairytale characters in the roles of deus ex machina and the villain.	*Transcription 1* *"Once upon a time there was a princess who was playing every day with her golden ball. One day she dropped the golden ball into the well and a frog brought it back to her but before the frog asked for his favor suddenly Lord Duloc came and grabbed the ball from the princess. But the Mother Goat who was nearby came to help. She bit Lord Duloc and he gave the ball back to the frog. Now the frog can ask from the princess to take him with her in the castle as a favor. But the princess didn't want him and she pushed him against the wall and his frog skin fell off and he became a king. The princess and the Frog King got married and they lived happily ever after."*	Familiar fairytale character 1: **Lord Duloc** from **"Shrek", by William Steig** Familiar fairytale character 2: **Mother Goat** from **"The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats", by Brothers Grimm** Attribution of a relative role to fairytale character 1: **"Lord Duloc came and grabbed the ball from the princess."** Attribution of a relative role to fairytale character 2: **"Mother Goat who was nearby came to help. She bit Lord Duloc and he gave the ball back to the frog."**
		WHERE HAVE THE FAIRYTALE HEROES GONE?: Preschoolers distinguish fairytale deux ex machina and villains in contemporary stories.		
	Attributing a relative role to the new character	THE KINGDOM OF THE GOOD WIZARD: In the board game "The Kingdom of the Good Wizard"-which contains hidden villains figures in its paths- every time the Good Wizard meets a villain he subverts their action and the new ending of the fairytale has to be narrated by the preschoolers.		
		FAIRYTALE-COLLAGE: Preschoolers add fairytale figures to photocopied pages of fairy tales and they narrate the new story that emerges from the introduction of the intertextual heroes, which play either the role of deus ex machina or the villain.		

Table 2.
Expression patterns of the Plot Subversion narrative element identified in preschoolers'
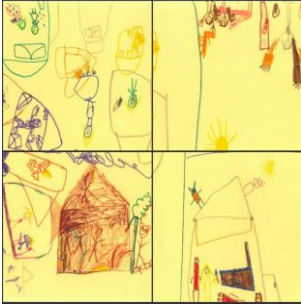*narrative speech during the teaching intervention.*

Narrative element	Expression pattern	Activity Description	Example of narrative speech	Expression pattern identified
Plot Subversion	Reversal of the fairytale pattern	MAGIC THREES: Preschoolers distinguish the pattern of threes through the text set of the classic "Goldilocks and the three bears" fairytale and the contemporary variant "Goldilocks and just one bear".	*Transcription 2* *"... In the Bears house Goldilocks decided to play with the colors because she liked painting. She painted the floor and the walls and the roof. Then she painted her shoes and her clothes and her socks. In the end she paint her face, her nose and her hair. When the three Bears returned to their house they slipped into the water colors that Goldilocks had forgotten to pick up from the floor. And then because Goldilocks left footprints all over the place with her colored shoes the Bears found her hiding. And when the three Bears saw Goldilocks' painted face and nose and hair they got scared and they ran away from their little house so Goldilocks stayed there forever."*	Reversal of the pattern of threes: **"She painted the floor and the walls and the roof. Then she painted her shoes and her clothes and her socks. In the end she paint her face, her nose and her hair."** Subversion of the sequence of events: **"When the three Bears returned to their house they slipped into the water colors that Goldilocks had forgotten to pick up from the floor. And then because Goldilocks left footprints all over the place with her colored shoes the Bears found her hiding. And when the three Bears saw Goldilocks' painted face and nose and hair they got scared and they ran away from their little house so Goldilocks stayed there forever."**
		THE GOOD AND THE BAD: Preschoolers distinguish the pattern of the good and the bad hero through the text set of the classic "Red Riding Hood" fairytale and the contemporary variant "The true story of Little Red Riding hood!".		
	A subversion of the sequence of events	PLAYING WITH MAGIC THREES: Preschoolers divided in groups change the pattern of threes in "Goldilocks and the three bears" and narrate the new sequence of events.		
		LOOK WHO'S TALKING!: In the board game "Meet you at the Granny's house" -where four different starting points and paths end up at the Grandmother's house- preschoolers play with the four pawns of Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, Granny, and the Hunter, reaching the house each time in a different chronological order and narrating the new sequence of events based on the new characters' profile.		

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Table 3.
Expression patterns of the combined use of Intertextual Hero and Plot Subversion narrative elements identified in preschoolers' narrative speech during the teaching intervention.

Narrative element	Expression pattern	Activity Description	Example of narrative speech	Expression pattern identified
Combination of intertextual hero and plot subversion	Use of a familiar fairytale character whose introduction causes a new sequence of events	PICTURE SHORT STORY BOARD: Preschoolers depict -both by text and illustration- the character, the scenery, the intertextual hero's introduction and the subversion of the fairytale's plot.	*Transcription 3* *"Once upon a time there was Red Riding Hood. She had moved to a big city where there were a lot of colorful houses. Every house had a different color but they all looked like each other. One day Red Riding Hood went to her Granny's house to bring her some soup. But she was lost in the big city and she couldn't find her way to the Granny's house because all houses look like each other. Then Pluto came to help her. He sniffed their way to the Granny's house but he also sniffed the Big Bad Wolf who was also inside the house. Pluto barked very loud and the Wolf got scared and he ran away without hurting the Granny. Red Riding Hood adopted Pluto to be her guide into the big city and she never lost her way to the Granny's house since then and they lived all together happily ever after in the colorful city."*	Introduction of a familiar character who causes a new sequence of events: ***"Then Pluto came to help her. He sniffed their way to the Granny's house but he also sniffed the Big Bad Wolf who was also inside the house. Pluto barked very loud and the Wolf got scared and he ran away without hurting the Granny. Red Riding Hood adopted Pluto to be her guide into the big city and she never lost her way to the Granny's house…"***

In Transcription 1 (Table 1), the expression pattern "reference to a familiar fairytale character" is identified. Preschoolers drew the Mother Goat and the Lord Duloc figures, cut them and glued them in the picture extracted from a familiar fairytale. Then, they reproduced the narrative basic structure of the "Frog King" maintaining the same narrative framing, while introducing in certain points of the plot the aforementioned characters in the text as well. There is a clear and concise reference to these two familiar fairytale characters by their names, and also a particular role attributed to them. Lord Duloc was introduced as the villain character, causing a problem to the protagonist, and Mother Goat was introduced as the deus ex machina character, helping the protagonist to find a solution to the problem. Preschoolers based on the profile of the intertextual characters assigned them with appropriate roles in the posterior narrative. Both references were interpreted as indicators of intertextual heroes.

In Transcription 2 (Table 2), the expression pattern "reversal of the fairytale pattern" is identified. After distinguishing the pattern of threes in "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" classic fairytale, preschoolers altered the context of this fairytale pattern. In their meta-narratives, they changed the protagonist's actions of sitting, eating and resting, with three different actions which caused totally different sequence of events. In the example of narrative speech, preschoolers depicted both in the picture and in the text all possible changes in the characters' action due to the new pattern of threes. What is worth noting is that the construction of the new pattern caused an alteration, not only to the plot but also to the production of a definitely different ending, the one that the three bears "*got scared and they ran away from their little house so Goldilocks stayed there forever*". Both the change of pattern and the new sequence were interpreted as indicators of plot subversion.

In Transcription 3 (Table 3), the expression pattern "use of a familiar fairytale character whose introduction causes a new sequence of events" is identified. At this point, preschoolers constructed illustrated storyboards, depicting the character, the scenery and the plot and, then, they produced their own picture short stories by combining the intertextual hero and the plot subversion elements. In this last example of narrative speech, it is clearly shown that the intertextual hero's introduction, in this case Pluto, which acted as the deus ex machina helping Red Riding Hood with her problem, caused the subversion of the plot of the classic fairytale leading to a different sequence of events. Preschoolers illustrated their narratives in a way that the intertextual heroes' introduction and the new sequence of events were clearly depicted in the picture as well. What is, also, worth mentioning is that preschoolers produced narratives which are suited to the contemporary type of picture short story. The last transcription includes a fairytale narrative framing, a narrative basic structure, an introduction of an intertextual hero and a subversion of the "Red Riding Hood" familiar plot. The length is short and there is a clear interaction between the picture and the text, where the two modes share different kinds of information and they equally transfer the meaning of the story.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1. Discussion of findings

Providing that during preschool age, narrative skill sets the grounds for narrative comprehension and literacy emergence, it is highly important to examine the potential of the narrative skill. Based on previous research, preschoolers are capable of acknowledging the narrative basic framing and structure and reproducing it (John et al., 2003; Morrow, 1985; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Applebee, 1978/1973). Especially when a picture/illustration is used as a guide, the retelling of the story can be considered more coherent and well-developed (Tompkins et al., 2012). The findings of the present research expand all previous findings and add to Sipe' s (2001) findings that first and second graders are capable of intertextual connection in their produced narratives. According to preschoolers' narrative speech context analysis, it can be assumed that children in this early stage are also capable of borrowing elements from earlier texts in order to use them in their own posterior narratives. Produced narratives, in which identifiable expression patterns were interpreted as indicators of the under-consideration narrative elements, show a notable development in preschoolers' narrative speech. All illustrated narratives are framed with fairytale beginnings and endings, present a protagonist who has a problem, introduce intertextual heroes either to help them with the problem or to cause further problems, and they subvert a familiar fairytale plot (Kalaitzi, 2018). The results confirmed the initial hypotheses that (1) preschoolers are able to use characters from earlier texts in their own narratives, attributing a distinctive role to each one of them, (2) they are able to subvert the plot sequence, by attributing a new context

to fairytale patterns, and (3) they are able to combine the narrative elements of intertextual hero and plot subversion in order to produce their own narratives suited to the type of picture short story, depicting different but equally important information in picture and in text.

The constructivist approach of the curriculum was considered as an appropriate basis to build upon the intervention (DeVries et al., 2002). The implementation was based on the natural development of narrative speech through preschool age (Applebee, 1973). Children were urged to build on the existing knowledge of familiar fairytale contexts, a skill which presupposes the decoding and interpretation of the perception of the narrative structure, as well as the recognition of the archetypal patterns (John et al., 2003). They used the already known fairytale basic structures, they distinguished familiar fairytale characters into the roles of deus ex machina and the villain, they improvised alterations to familiar fairytale patterns, and subsequently, they produced their own illustrated variants of tales.

The effectiveness of focus group lies on the fact that this methodology enabled the observation of discussion and the narrative speech transcription (Wilkinson, 1998). The empirical observation presented in this particular research confirms the practicality of an intervention including specially designed activities which can be used by preschool educators in order to enable preschoolers' narrative speech enhancement.

4.2. Contribution of the current study and future research implications

It could be supported that the present research contributes to the discussion regarding the potential of narrative skill's development during early childhood. Based on the results of the present research, narrative speech can be enriched further than previous research has shown. The combined use of intertextual connections and patterns subversion sets a new level of competency concerning narrative skill at preschool stage.

Given that the teaching intervention was implemented for the purposes of the present research at preschool stage, a multi-level approach is recommended for future use in order to achieve a holistic evaluation of reliability. Specifically, apart from the evaluation of performance at preschool age (level 1), the exploration of teacher's experience and attitude towards the effectiveness of the intervention could be considered (level 2), whilst demographics of regions where the kindergartens located can be also included (level 3). With that multilevel analysis of nested data, the different levels (preschooler, teacher, kindergarten) will provide a more complete view due to multiple dimensions and criteria (Frenzel, Pekrun, & Goetz, 2007), providing that a consecutive implementation of the intervention in older stages could lead to assumptions regarding the development of narrative speech with regards to the use of combined narrative elements.

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