

21st Century Toddlers' Dialogues with Traditional Toy Songs

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Abstract: Toys songs follow specific rhythmic patterns and presuppose movement, teamwork and collaboration. Their involvement in the educational process contributes significantly to the balanced development of toddlers. In our proposal, the toy songs are further used by the gamers, a fun context they recommend, to encourage the participating students to produce original narrative texts. The texts are created based on the title or a verse of the playful songs based on the teaching principle of declining guidance. They evolve as an imitation or as a modification or as a reversal of the initial stimulus, expressing the characteristics, experiences and desires of their little creators. The ability for toy songs not only to entertain but also to inspire today's toddlers proves their timelessness. Toddlers' stories are recorded on a computer and are available as a form and as a post on the school blog, both to their creators and to the entire online community, to enhance the willingness to participate in similar activities.

Key words: creative storytelling, team games, texts

1. Introduction

The need for disposition for play (Huizinga, 1989) has always been the dominant element of childhood. Nowadays, in particular, this mood is sometimes manifested or even exhausted, from infancy, by the constant preoccupation with electronic games. Toddlers spend much of their time absorbed in front of computers, a process that is static and solitary in nature. In addition, the image in general, in our time has dominated in infinite ways versus speech and text, although the latter offers much more to the activity of reading imagination (Anagnostopoulos, 2007).

In these conditions, the participation of toddlers in well-known traditional playful songs (Bada, 1993) characterized by mobility, teamwork (Diamantopoulos, 2009) and verbal communication, will significantly contribute to their physical, linguistic, emotional, mental and social development. The interaction between the children in the classroom, which the specific toy songs presuppose, and the enjoyment and satisfaction that they offer to the participants, make them a very effective means of learning and especially self-knowledge, improvement and development of various skills (Oxley, 2005). More specifically, the contact of toddlers with toy songs will contribute to their initiation into folklore tradition and their approach to the generations of their ancestors. It will also help toddlers acquire a culture of cooperation and promote companionship (Hatzimanoli, 2001).

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2. Presentation of The Teaching Subject

We will focus on the participation of toddlers in two of the most widespread traditional toy songs, “All around” and “You don’t pass Mrs. Maria”. In both games, the children form a closed circle with their forehead towards its center and walk in its right direction while accompanying their movement with their rhythmic song.

According to the play song “All around”, one of the children remains in the center of the circle and together with the others who walk around him, they adjust their movements to the context of the lyrics. In the play song “You don’t pass Mrs. Maria”, a dialogue is developed between the child impersonating Ms. Maria and the others in the circle, in order to convince them to allow her to pass in the supposed gardens, inside the circle. During the dialogue, the circle is gradually deconstructed, as one by one the children leave it, following in pairs “Mrs. Maria”.

3. Basic Principle of the Proposed Teaching Approach

Considering that the educational process in the school context should take advantage of every opportunity and occasion for students to discover and express their creativity (Kotopoulos, 2012) a different management and utilization of game songs is proposed here to serve this very position. Toddlers are challenged to develop personal dialogue with them, to express themselves in an original way through their participation, to appropriate them and to enrich them with their personal characteristics, to connect them with their experiences and desires.

With the above teaching approach regarding the traditional toy songs, the cultivation of the creative thinking and expression of the toddlers, their linguistic and aesthetic development and the ability of listening and communication are sought. Furthermore, in the above teaching context, the toddlers understand the possibility of the written speech to represent the spoken language and become familiar with the process of writing on a computer.

4. Methodology: The Teaching Steps

After each game is repeated several times, always according to the mood of the children, then we suggest a different alternative activity. In the case of the toy song “All around”, we isolate its title and encourage the children to create a story that begins with the specific words. The only condition we set is that each individual story is different, unique, original in order to be included in the relevant “book” of the class. As for the play song “You don’t pass Mrs. Maria”, we recite it as a group and when we reach the verse “What are you gonna do in the gardens?”, we ask each toddler to give a different answer, creating a narrative story.

In order to encourage toddlers in the process of narration, the teacher first asks general questions and then additional, clarifying, in relation to the previous answers he has received about the actors, the place and time of action and others that help children to organize their thinking and aim to gradually improve their narrative activity. The teacher, who is a very attentive listener, using the questions and answers (Pascucci and Rossi, 2002), to emerge a complete narrative story essentially applies the teaching principle of “declining guidance” (Matsagouras, 2001, pp. 180-182, 199-203). The narrative texts that toddlers produce individually or in groups (Huck, 1979) are recorded by the classroom teacher on a computer, as a single text in each case. In the same way, in the form of a single text, reading immediately after the teacher in all the toddlers, either from the screen or after they are printed. Thus, toddlers who are not yet able to write by themselves, have the opportunity to verify the fidelity and accuracy of their recorded texts.

What follows is the illustration from all toddlers of each individual or group story that has preceded. Then, a book is created that includes the various texts, as well as all the drawings of the toddlers regarding them. On the cover of each book the title is written, "All around" or "What are you gonna do in the gardens?". The book is placed in the school library so that all students can "read" it at any time. At the same time, the e-book is made, as the texts and their relevant illustrations are posted on the school blog on the Panhellenic School Network, as well as on the blogs of the groups in which the school participates so that as many people as possible have access to them. In fact, we do not fail to give our technologically advanced choice an ecological and economic dimension in order to sensitize the children about it.

The varied use of children's texts also includes their theatrical performance. Children's texts are turned into events and presented by the toddlers themselves in open school events. In the phase of the utilization of the texts, special importance is given, since this utilization works for the students as an additional "motivation" in order to express themselves freely and creatively (Ilia and Matsagouras, 2006, pp. 312–313).

Toddlers spontaneously repeat the above process to each other as a free activity, which in this case turns into a mimetic game. A toddler plays the teacher and the rest play the role of the students and of course the roles alternate. It is worth noting that that this free activity is not only focused on the two toy songs but also extends to various titles of literary books or lyrics of songs chosen by the children themselves. Thus, students create many additional opportunities and occasions to express their preferences to their classmates, to exchange and share their different personal experiences.

5. Identity of the Authors of the Texts

Group stories with the general title "What are you gonna do in the gardens?" unfolded during the school year 2014-2015 in a classroom where the four-year-olds amounted to thirteen while the five-year-olds to eleven. The individual stories with the central theme "All around" took place the following school year, 2015–2016, in a classroom where the majority of five-year-olds were in their second year of nursery school, when they had already participated in last year's group narratives. This year's four-year-olds were just three and were all boys.

6. Results

In order to demonstrate the ability of traditional play songs to function under specific conditions, as a stimulus, field of inspiration and creative expression for toddlers, we quote below some of their stories. On the one hand, these are three of the group stories about the game "What are you gonna do in the gardens?" and on the other hand for three of the individual narratives with the theme "All around".

6.1 Children's Texts on "What Are You Gonna Do in the Gardens?"

A little girl enters the garden on a sunny morning to pick pine needles and pine cones. She goes to the second grade of elementary school and wants to use these materials to do a school project. She first picks up all the pine cones on the ground but needs more. She then thinks of climbing the pines and cutting other pine cones. She goes to the warehouse to get a ladder. She drags the ladder to the garden soil and avoids the flowers so as not to destroy them because she loves them so much. She leans up the ladder to the pine tree that the most pine cones and goes up. The little girl has a basket passed on her arm to put the pine cones. When she finishes, she cannot get down because she carries a lot of weight. She slips and falls with the ladder. Her knee is bleeding and she is scared. She enters the

house where dad immediately opens the first aid kit and gets everything he needs to treat the wound. The little girl cries like a baby because it hurts a lot. Then, her dad plays a trick, a crazy trick, to make his little girl laugh and thus forget his wound. When mum comes home, dad is still playing tricks. Then, the little girl explains to them how she hurt herself. They all go out together in the garden to pick the fallen pine cones. But the pine cones are no longer there. A squirrel family have their nest in a pine tree. The little squirrels have taken all the pine cones, one by one, to the last. The little girl shouts to the squirrels that she needs the pine cones for her school project. But they do not understand. So, her parents help her pick other pine cones from the pine trees so that she does not fall again.

Snow falls on the grass of the garden and covers everything. The little girl who sees the snow from her window dresses in a jacket, scarf, gloves, hat and goes out to play snowfall fight with her brother. He is much older and makes a snowman for the little girl. They dig the snow together and find little stories. They put two for the snowman's eyes. For the nose they place a carrot. They also cut two twigs and make them into the snowman's hands to wear mum's red woolen gloves. They wear the snowman dad's green scarf and a purple hat. They place the rest of the little stones for buttons and to make the mouth of the snowman together with the cores from the olives that dad eats. When the snowman is ready, they hug him because they love him to heaven. As long there is snow in the garden, they make sure the snowman is well. The snow melts five days later and the snowman melts with it. The little girl feels bad and her brother takes a plastic snowman out in the garden that Santa Claus once gave them. They leave this snowman on the garden grass every day until the afternoon and in the evening they take him in and put him next to the girl's bed to accompany her. Even the summers that they go on vacation, they take the snowman with them. Many years go by without snow and yet the little girl is always accompanied by the snowman.

A child is playing alone in the garden because his sister is playing in the house with her computer. She had also gone out in the garden but quickly got bored. When she plays on her computer, she never gets bored. She plays cooking games, a game that sells ice cream, a game with a bull that she must avoid so as not to lose, and a game with zombies that must kill them all and go as far as she can to buy things. She is trying to reach the last track. If she crosses the track, she will go to the second map. The boy gets bored alone in the garden and enters the house to help his sister with video games. The game she plays is his and so the boy knows it better. The two siblings prefer to play on the computer rather than in the garden. They download a lot of computer games so when they get bored of one, they play another. In the garden they only play hide-and-seek, hunting and "All around". They only go out to play in the garden when dad turns off the computer because they have been playing for a long time. Mum and dad are not happy to see that their children want to play on the computer all the time but let them play because then they are happy. Once upon a time there was a power outage and then the children played board games for the first time. They had a good time with this game but as soon as the power came on they went back to the computer.

6.2 Children's Texts on "All Around"

We are with all my classmates around a dog that has been hit by a car and is lying on the road. It was going to find food when the red car passed. The man driving it had not seen it and hit it by mistake. Since he was a doctor, he immediately took care of its wound. We thought at first to cross the road with the dog to take care of it. We also thought to hold a flashlight so that cars can see us and not hit the dog when it passes by. But if the dog is very hungry, it will not wait for us to cross the road and will be in danger. So finally we will find another solution to bring food to the dog every day.

Around our truck are me, Stathis, George, Angelos and many other people. Our truck that all our friends have together is orange and very strong and everyone admires it. We load people's garbage in the truck and throw it away.

We also load stones that we sell to people to build houses. I drive the truck and my friends help me load it and unload it.

The boys of our class are around the fox and me, Angeliki and Isidora are with them. We are students in the High School and we have come on a trip to the forest for camping. Here we met a fox. It slipped off a cliff and fell into a trap. My two friends and I released it and laid it down to take care of its leg. I always make sure I have medicines, bandages, a headset, adhesive dressings and injections with me because I like animals and I want to take care of them. So, I put the fox's leg in the cast. When I remove the plaster, the fox will walk normally.

7. Conclusions

Students as a whole respond willingly and enthusiastically to the activity. They produce original texts, all different from each other, although the stimulus is common, thus proving the quality of their creative thinking. Many toddlers take into account in their stories elements that were mentioned by their classmates. They do, however, take advantage of these elements and extend them.

In addition, when toddlers illustrate stories, there is a significant relevance between the texts and the drawings. The alternation of the roles of the narrator and the illustrator contributes to the quality of participation in both cases. As narrators, toddlers seek to gain their audience, while as illustrators, they seek to become more attentive and responsible listeners. This results in very interesting narrative stories and at the same time attractive paintings.

Despite the variety of individual children's stories regarding the verse "all around", there is a common element in almost all of them. The people the toddlers refer to in their stories are their classmates, a fact that reveals the close relationships that have developed in the classroom.

Children's stories often include the daily habits of toddlers and incidents of their family and school life. An important factor that determines the narrative outcome is timeliness. From them results that toddlers use this process to express themselves.

Watching this activity unfold as a free play for toddlers, we see to what extent they have assimilated the questions that the teacher usually asks in order to continue and complete their stories. This is where the foundations for the development of toddlers in the subject of creative writing are laid. The toddler who asks, even imitates the process of recording narratives that is running using a game-laptop, which is the most popular game in the classroom. It therefore proves the importance that toddlers themselves attach to recording their thoughts and their complete familiarity with the computer as a means of writing.

The initiation of children in the folklore tradition through their acquaintance with the toy songs is combined with the expression of the particularity, the uniqueness of each one and the development of cooperation on multiple levels. There is therefore significant progress of toddlers in achieving their socio-emotional maturity.

Toddlers express themselves linguistically and kinetically, and develop aesthetically as they come into creative contact with tradition. Thus, they experience the creative dimension of human nature and realize the timeliness of human creativity.

With the varied utilization (internet, etc.) of their works, the opening of the school to the wider society is achieved, which leads to communication and understanding between the different generations and offers everyone optimism and hope.

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