

Teaching Values with Stories and Tales in the Preschool Period

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Abstract

The preschool period is a time when children develop their character and they gain skills they can use throughout their life. During this period, national, religious and moral sentiments of children are shaped and they internalize the values they learn. It is not possible for preschoolers to learn values cognitively through reading, writing, and listening. The introduction of affective and psycho-motor dimensions requires conscious efforts of role models. The most important materials used for teaching values during the preschool period are stories and tales. We believe that this theoretical study examining how stories and tales can be used as a material to teach children values will be helpful for teachers involved in preschool education, families, program development experts and the relevant departments of the ministry.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Story, Tale, Value Education

Introduction

In recent years, value education has been increasingly important and incorporated in the school curriculums. The debates on how to teach values are still ongoing; however, what is certain is that value education is necessary and the foundations of this education are laid during the preschool period. Therefore, the preschool period and family education become prominent. Particularly, it is necessary to define the goals of value education during the preschool period and to plan the methods and activities that will help achieving these goals. As Dewey indicates, value and moral education cannot be provided separately inside and outside of schools. Pointing out the importance of religious education for the first time in the middle ages, J.A.Comenius indicated in his book "The Great Didactic" as follows: "*Wool is so tenacious of the color with which it is first dyed, that it cannot be bleached. The wooden hoop of a wheel, which has been bent into a curve, will break into a thousand pieces rather than return to straightness. And similarly, in a man, first impressions cling so fast that nothing but a miracle can remove them.*" (Comenius, 1964:49).

Although the ethical and philosophical aspects of value education are given more importance in Turkey, it seems that the teachers of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge have been left holding the bag regarding value education. Institutions are expected to act in coordination and contribute to value education by using the hidden curriculum. Another important thing is to plan which values to teach and how, when and by whom to teach them, without making repetitions and boring students. We have to ask the questions, "Can everything adults ask their children to do to satisfy their subjective feelings be considered as a value?" and "What is the place of doing well at school and exams in value education?"

All kind of emotions, thoughts, behaviors and rules generally accepted or adopted by a society are called values. United National Education Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines values education as "the educational efforts made to help children and young people explore positive values, improve them and proceed based on their own potential". Education plays an important role in conveying the system of values for the ideals of a society to the individuals. It is not possible to think of an education system without values. The real question should be "Which values should be taught at schools and how should they be taught?" instead of "Should schools provide values education?" Preschool period is of critical importance in the field of values education, just as in other fields. Tales, stories, jokes, poems and songs are the materials that can be used to teach values during this period. This study mostly focused on the use of tales and stories.

Tales and Stories in Teaching Values

Stories and tales are important text materials used in education. The fairy tale world is a real world for a child. The use of these texts can help children better understand and internalize the moral and religious values. Through these texts, children can be guided to the right path, can build an attachment with the storytelling adults and learn to love and being loved (Günay, 1979:17). The French author George Duhamel points out the importance of tales in child education as follows: "Imagination of children unavoidably pushes them to be occupied with tales. Even if we don't tell them tales, they can create their own. We should at least help them by telling tales" (Demiray, 1962:24). The use of stories and tales has been adopted as a method in modern education in the US and Europe, and recently in Turkey (Crawford, 2009:49-61). Although some atheist scientists like R.Dawkins indicate that telling tales to children makes them "supernaturalist", leading them to move away from science and believe in god, it is evident that this thought is not scientific (Dawkins, Hürriyet/09.06.2014). Some theorists like Boileau and J.J. Rousseau also opposed to the idea of using tales in child education on the grounds that tales cause them to move away from real life, thus leading them to false beliefs and preventing logical

reasoning (Kantarcioğlu, 1991:21).

However, those arguing that tales and stories are important materials in education predominate. Aydın points out the role of stories in education as follows: "...education should primarily consist of patterns aiming to help learners gain emotions like emphatic awareness, sensitiveness, kindness, grace, tolerance, understanding and affection. In this sense, stories serve as a mirror at which people can look themselves and the life they live. In real life, stories have a mystical power that reflects the wisdom and hidden and explicit troubles of humanity. Therefore, education is, in a way, an art of storytelling and understanding... It is extremely difficult for an education system that does not have its own stories and does not know how to use stories to mature in mentally, intellectually and emotionally..." (Aydın, 2012:III,IV)

Piaget and Kohlberg also used stories to examine the moral development of children (Doğan-Tosun, 2003:107-111; Bacanlı, 2011:108-111; Senemoğlu, 2013: 66-75). It is important to note that telling stories to examine moral development of children and developing theories based on their answers are different from teaching children values through storytelling. It is also important to distinguish between technical use of stories and the use of story contents. Stories and tales are important sources for true religion, love of God and knowing people. We can see it clearly in Andersen's fairy tales (Andersen, 2011; Aydın, 2011:49). Stories and tales have some advices and they carry educational value. The style used in stories is also easy to understand. Through this technique, even the most difficult issues can be explained and remembered easily. If a story is taken from a holy book and has a religious dimension, it is more effective (Bilgin, 1994; 51-54; Aydın, 2005; 268,269). Tales have an important role in attracting children's attention to events and objects and developing their thinking skills. Those who were not told tales when they were children do not have sufficient thinking skills. Tales know no limits in terms of events and objects. Anything can happen in a tale. There is no limit to thinking. A bird we ride on takes us to the Mount Qaf within seconds. The children growing up with tales have no limit to their thinking (Başar, 2013; 54). One of the most important criteria for a child to be creative is to get beyond the usual areas defined by traditions and to push to the limits.

How can we use tales and stories?

We can list the advantages of telling tales and stories to children as follows:

- 1- It facilitates the improvement of children's memory;
- 2- It provides the perfect preparation for composition;
- 3- It helps introducing historical and literary personalities and statesmen to the children;
- 4- It improves the literary taste of children;
- 5- It helps fixing the pronunciation problems in children;
- 6- It helps the development of conscious in children (Charrier-Ozouf, 1972:207-210).

The aim of storytelling is to attract children's attention, to please them and to keep their mind fresh. Therefore, it is used in education. Besides, the most important advantage of storytelling in terms of education is that it helps headstrong and idle minds get accustomed to staying focused and builds attachment between teachers and students. Moreover, storytelling improves the imagination of young minds, opening new horizons and helping to gain reasoning skills. The fact that joy and taking pleasure are perfect and important factors for mental abilities shows how important the role of storytelling in education is (Emre, 2000:15,17).

To Polat and Tosun, the behaviors told in stories and tales are presented with their causes and effects; therefore, stories and tales instill the act of transforming moral values into behaviors. Listeners may establish a connection between the experiences of the characters in the story and their experiences, observe the mental and sentimental reflections of the behavior models they care and approve or criticize their emotions and behaviors. This means establishment of communication and dialog between the teller and the listener, which is extremely important in terms of education (Polat-Tosun, 2015:375). It will be a more effective if the message in the story or tale intended to be conveyed to the child listeners is not directly told and they are expected to think, feel and express it themselves. Stories improve the students' ability to express, think and interpret.

What is important is to decide which story or tale would be appropriate for the age of listeners and to choose the wording carefully. Not all stories and tales are appropriate for every age group. Experiences and the preferences of children might be guiding rather than a deep psychological knowledge. Turkish culture is uniquely rich in tales, jokes and stories. We may single out the jokes of Nasreddin Hodja as an exception. Usually requiring making an inference from what is told, the jokes of Nasreddin Hodja may not be appropriate for children who do not have the abstract thinking ability. In his book, Ahmet Cevat told that children mostly like fairy tales, wolf tales, funny tales and history stories, pointing out that each story type has a different educational focus and improves the abilities of children. He emphasized that all story types, especially history stories, would make a great contribution to the development of the feeling of patriotism, national and religious feelings, brotherhood and spirituality (Emre, 2000:18-23).

The stories for children should have three important features:

- 1- Constant change: Children are instinctively addicted to change. Stories with intricate feelings that hard

to understand are only helpful for children of older ages. Therefore, what characters do is important in the chosen story rather than literary descriptions, complex structures that confuse the mind and rules of logic.

- 2- Simple and plain miraculousness or mysteriousness: If the characters and events are not simple, the imagination of children cannot comprehend them. The story elements should be simple and appropriate to the mental background of children. Imaginations that the minds of children are not familiar with lead to distraction and kill the pleasure. Imaginations that do not require much mental effort attract the attention of children.
- 3- Repetition: Just like a mathematician enjoying solving a difficult problem with a chain of equations, children easily understand each event in a story, try to get the whole picture and enjoy doing this. Repetition helps them do so. If a story includes poetic and simple nursery rhymes, it is appropriate for preschoolers (Emre, 2000:29,30).

The American Miss Sara Braynt whose book Ahmet Cevat Emre said had inspired him indicates that the storyteller should taste the spirit, delicacy and, so to speak, “the salt” of a story and should know the story as required so that it can be effective on children. Knowing a story does not mean memorizing it, but telling it by experience. A calm, steady and good tone of voice and pronunciation makes a story effective (Emre, 2000:32-37).

We can use stories and tales in education in three ways: We can share an existing story and expect them to perceive the intended message. Stories from the Quran, hadiths about the ancient tribe that use the story technique, the literary works about children can be used. Students may be encouraged to write their own stories. This helps them use their imagination effectively and achieve effective learning. An existing story or a tale can be left at a moment of peril and the students can be expected to complete it (Polat-Tosun, 2015:375).

There is no need for moral explanations and advices at the end of the stories. They already consist of such explanations and advices and they are conveyed to the child’s soul. If children realize that a story is structured and told to give them moral lessons, they cannot look at it as an entertaining and heart-warming piece of art, but rather as a boring lesson. A child made the following explanation about such stories: “Stories are good, but there is always a boring supplement at the end of them” (Emre, 2000:37). Stories help children make an identification with the characters and feel that they are not alone and unsupported (Brooks, 1985: 761-769). Works of Ömer Seyfettin, Ziya Gökalp, Ahmet Cevat Emre, Ayhan Aydın, Mevlana (Mesnevi), Özer (Özer, 2014) and Salzmänn (Salzmänn: 2004) can be used for this purpose. The stories from the world literature or Turkish literature selected by Aydın, fables told in *Mesnevi*, the stories by Ömer Seyfettin that highlight national feelings can be used for children of all ages. What lies behind the success of Andersen in this field is his use of colloquial idioms and phrases, his way of associating the tale world with the real world and his ability of taking children to a journey from the language of the outer world to the language of the inner world through the use of speaking animals (Andersen,2011:9). *Beyza Teyze’den Hikâyeler* (Stories from Aunt Beyza) which aims to use the stories from the Quran in education is a very important resource to be used (Bilgin, 1993).

In the preschool period, story completion, story reading and telling and picture book reading are covered within the scope of Turkish course activities. Storytelling which helps the children who can't read and write yet is the responsibility of family elders in the home and of teachers at the school. It requires the use of some techniques. A story appropriate to the interest and level of children should be selected. The teller should know the story well. New stories or those already known should be told. During the telling of a story, an enthusiastic tone of voice changing depending on the characters should be used. Eye contact with the children should be maintained and all concepts and words should be expressed clearly. The teller should correspond the meaning by changing the voice, pitch and speed of tone. Pauses should be used while moving from one event to another. Proper tone of voice and mimics should be used and student participation should be promoted by activities such as collectively saying the sentences in the story (Zemba et al. 2013:325).

Teachers should meet the following criteria if they want their students to reap the benefits of the stories and tales told by them:

- 1- Making children to repeat the stories on their own;
- 2- Making children to perform the plays of the stories;
- 3- Giving stories as painting or handcraft assignments (Emre, 2000:38).

Tales and stories have the power to impress not only children, but also adults. While mentioning about the effect of stories, Ahmet Cevat asks the following questions: “Which one do you think impress and haunt the reader, pages of a moral book full of scholarly opinions, provisions and advices or a nice novel which describes the realized version of moral subjects, so to speak, their “animated” version? Then he asks “Which one is more effective, a written story or a story told by someone?” and answers this question as follows: “Which one impresses us more, reading a novel or watching a play adapted from that novel? Of course, the theatre play” (Emre, 2000:13). Charrier and Ozouf pointed out the contribution of selected works to the moral development of children and emphasized that it would be more tasteful and understandable if a moral behavior intended to be

taught was mixed in a story, tale or a joke. In this way, that behavior is concretely presented to the learners. A simple moral lesson bores children; however, the beauty of a tale eliminates the simplicity of a moral lesson (Charrier-Ozouf, 1972:210).

Tales and stories make great contribution to the self actualization, language development, socialization and integration into society of children as well as their value judgement. Besides, they help children be optimistic in life, respect to the environment and others, make sense of the concepts of good-bad, right and justice as well as contributing to their emotional, cognitive, mental and psychosocial development in terms of the issues such as lying, bravery, and honesty (Zembat, 2013:324; Kantarcioğlu, 1991:17). Education includes patterns that teach the socially accepted values to individuals as emotional transformations. In this sense, stories and other similar texts serve as a mirror at which people can look themselves and the life they live. From this point of view, Aydın describes education as “an art of storytelling and understanding.” and points out that it is extremely difficult for an education system that does not have its own stories and does not know how to use stories to mature in mentally, intellectually and emotionally (Aydın, 2012:5,6). Tales and stories also have the function of facilitating understanding abstract expressions which stall the learning process as well as making an expression understandable by means of concretization (Okumuşlar, 2006:238). Even the most difficult subjects can be taught easily by means of the story technique and can become memorable. Religious stories are effective in the development of religious understanding. Such stories are first told by family members, and then religious officials and teachers. Due to the psychological effect of stories, they cannot be forgotten and can be passed down from one generation to another (Bilgin, 1994:51,54,55).

Berkowitz suggests paying attention to the following criteria for the character development of a child. These criteria are closely related to values education.

- 1- The behaviors of people towards the children have a tremendous impact on their character development. Adults should behave affectionately, honestly, supportively, openly, coherently and respectfully.
- 2- The behaviors of adults towards each other in front of the children are also effective. Children constantly watch and imitate their parents, teachers and the other adults around them.
- 3- Schools should want all their students to be well-natured individuals and, to do so, should implement the hidden curriculum consciously together with their whole staff.
- 4- Children should encounter and adopt positive character traits in schools. Teachers, administrators and other school staff take various responsibilities in this sense.
- 5- The children should be provided with the opportunity to practice the good character traits they imitate.
- 6- The children should be allowed to talk about, discuss and respond to religious and moral issues and values. They should be provided with such an environment.
- 7- Families should support schools and share the efforts they made for character development and values education. They should attend should activities and meet with the teachers (as cited in: Balat, 2012:31,32).

It is important to note that there was an instruction for teaching sayings and poems in addition to the activities such as swimming and horse riding in a text written by Umar rumored to be distributed to all regions and considered as the first curriculum during the early years of Islam (Çelebi, 1976:45). We should remember the sincerity and sentimentality Ömer Seyfettin’s “İlk Namaz” (First Salaat) and how the worship, prays and the Quran recitation affected him (Seyfettin, 2013:9-16). The studies conducted in this field can be used (Aydın, 2012; Bilgin,1993; Akıncı,2001)

In the West, stories have always been important in religious education. The priest and religious educator Christoph von Schmid points out the importance of stories in religious and values education based on his experiences as follows: “My father used to tell me stories with special care and in a sincere and respectful way. Some of them were religious stories. The things he told about the Lord, who cared the first man like a father caring his children affected me deeply, and more than the high-level concepts about God my religious teacher tried to teach us although they were not appropriate for children. With simple Bible verses, I found the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, and developed a childish love and respect to him” (Tosun, 2013:170,171). According to the German educator Stachel, the story technique is a technique that helps children understand religious subjects easily. A style of speaking is developed between the tellers and the listeners, and this style takes them to the signs of God’s words (Stachel, 1977:59,60). In German, documents that incorporate stories, poems and concepts designed to teach children values and moral behaviors are used intensively at schools (Thömmes, 2015:24-27). Such studies may guide us regarding the methods and techniques. Stories and tales about our religious and national culture should be used intensively in the education of children and the story technique should be used to help them understand abstract and metaphysic subjects. While doing so, age groups, language of the story and what issues the story sheds light to should be taken into consideration. The concepts used in a story constitute another important factor to consider. The concepts that children can understand should be used or the instructors should try having the students find the concepts they want to teach. It is possible to achieve this by taking account of the natural interests and needs of the children.

Let's take a look at what a kindergarten teacher said in the diary in which she kept records of her experiences: "...During the religious education hours, the children were not active as much as they were in other activities and they wanted me only to tell stories. I made a continuous effort to give this course a new appearance. I began to have little chats with the little children. One day, we began to talk what we like and about the creatures we like. It came to the beauties and good things God created. We listed these things for a while and came to an agreement that "there are many reasons to thank God". Then I brought a book and put it on my desk. The book stayed there for three weeks. During this period, the children told me the things we should thank God for and I wrote them down in the book. They made pictures and I glued them on the book. Then we examined the book together. We talked about prayers and being good. We tried to make up and write small prayers. Some were very good at it, while others were not into it. Then we memorized a small prayer as a class." Here is a prayer by a six-year-old written in the book of the teacher:

*Thank you for the sun that shines
And food we eat
And the snow that falls and the rain that falls
And the plants that grow and the birds that fly
And the color books you gave to us.
Lord, thank you. (Goldman, 1978:95-97).*

Preschoolers should learn to express their religious descriptions, feelings, attitudes, behaviors and experiences using their own words (Selçuk, 1991:50,51). Teachers should encourage them to do so. The most common prayer said in the kindergartens in Turkey is as follows:

*Before I eat my meal,
I raise my hands for prayer,
Please Lord,
Bless me with intellect, health and honesty,
Bless me with good traits.
If I don't eat,
I cannot go to school,
Let's eat quickly and go to school.
And pray to the Lord,
Who protects us all,
Amen!
May our meal be one of joy,
May our drink be one of healing,
May all of us enjoy our food. (Selçuk, 1991:51)*

These examples show that poems and songs can be used in value education during the preschool period.

For the sake of the children, Bilgin calls for all those working in the field of education as follows:

"Here is my request to all performers and all those literate people who may contribute to this issue: Please do not destroy the children's fantasy. I am of the opinion that a mistake has been made in today's world. There is a wrong practice of finding only the wrongdoings, problems and guilts worthy to put down on paper or display. If we continue doing so just in order to become popular, some children and young people will unavoidably be guided to negative behaviors. I don't mean hiding the problems and misdeeds. But, we cannot protect the children and young people, even ourselves, by highlighting only the problems and hoping to have some lessons learned from them. In order to improve our ability to choose and to allow for making personal preferences, what is negative, positive, right, wrong, good, bad, beautiful, ugly, halal, ill-gotten should be addressed together with the effects they will bring on the life as a whole. As the adults, we should first remember what is good, right, beautiful and halal with the importance they deserve. As the ones using their knowledge for good, we should flush them out. Let's pay compliments to them, introduce them again and again with knowledge and delicacy in the tales, poems, stories, novels, songs, folksongs, drawings, roads, bazaars and everywhere. Let's show people that we have things to be praised and feel happy about as much as those we complain of, and show them how we can add many more. Let's give people a new soul and excitement. I ask our people for help." (Bilgin, 1995:78).

Hidden Curriculum and Values Education

Educators indicate that schools have two types of curriculums. The first one is the written curriculum prepared by authorized public or private institutions. Schools are obliged to implement this formal curriculum. The second one is the curriculum that is not written and explicit like the formal one. This curriculum is argued to have more impact on students than the formal one. This curriculum is also known by the names such as "hidden curriculum", "implicit curriculum" and "verbal curriculum" (Yüksel, 2004:7,8). The concept of hidden curriculum was first introduced in 1968 by Philip W. Jackson.

Curriculums usually incorporate in-class activities and formal education. Extracurricular, social and verbal activities are covered within the scope of hidden curriculum and they are said to have more impact on the students than the formal curriculum. Effective planning of extracurricular time and activities is much of help to the students in behavior development. From this aspect, the concept also has sociological importance. Teaching values to the students through hidden curriculum emerges in the interactions between the students and teachers, either intentionally or unintentionally. Hidden curriculum is more of a program run together with the formal curriculum that depends on the behaviors of teachers and administrators and the system of beliefs and values they have. The school environment, the interaction pattern provided by the school to the students and the cultural attitude are the elements of hidden education (Merter, 2013:32).

What makes hidden curriculum critical is that it is more effective during the process of learning values than the written curriculum despite its being verbal. Ethics courses in the formal curriculum do not necessarily make the students ethical. Here, behaviors of the teachers as role models are of high importance. Another important point is that administrators and teachers should be aware of this curriculum and process and should be involved in it consciously. Value education can be provided everywhere humans live. Adults are positive, negative or neutral models for the students. Schools, shuttle buses, sports activities and games are all part of the value education. The curriculum, books and the way of teaching shape the value education (Ulusoy-Dilmaç, 2012: 60,77,78).

Conclusion and Suggestions

From the ancient times to the present, the most important purpose of families, schools and society has been to raise ethical and hardworking generations that will exhibit the behaviors they want. Throughout this period including today, humanity unfortunately failed to raise young people equipped with the desired traits to the full. Almost everyone complains about the schools and agrees on the fact that young people grow up lacking in some traits. If we ask they are like that:

Everything planned and implemented to raise new generations, i.e. children, are prepared by the adults. We need to achieve looking from the eyes of a child. To this day, we have tried to manage the events “looking from the outside” and to obtain results from the curriculums we implemented. Now, we should set this aside and try to proceed by “looking from the inside.” I suppose it is not necessary to emphasize the importance of empathy. The question is whether the families are at a level to teach values to their children. We have to answer this question “no”. In our society, values are taught by giving advices and dictating. Then how should it be? Child raising by being swamped with books or learning through books is not a valid methods for the families of the Turkish society. It seems that the teachers of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge have been left holding the bag regarding value education. However, this education should be provided in all courses by all teachers. Students and behaviors are parts of a whole. Therefore, schools should teach values with their teachers, administrators and other school staff using its infrastructure and acting together with the families.

However, there is no need to worry much about our children. Through opening our eyes wide, we can achieve what tens of books in our traditional culture and education could not achieve. Over discipline to educate or giving free rein to provide freedom is not a good method. It is also not a solution to pass the buck only to families or schools and take the easy way out. First, parents should be affectionate, cheery and friendly, and they should intend to educate their children in real terms. Teachers should also have the same feelings and should value the children and give confidence to them. Being sincere may solve every problem. Coherence between what we say and what we do is a sign of sincerity. If our advices and recommendations are only at a cognitive level, they cannot be effective on the children. We should move them to the affective and psychomotor levels so that they can be effective. As Salzmann indicates, if we want to teach values to the children, we should first teach them to the adults together with how they should convey these values to the children.

We should increase the number of activities in the curriculums and course books that require the participation of families. Maybe, we should first clarify the family-school relationship. One of the most important problems of the preschool education is the lack of communication between families and school. Therefore, preschool teachers should feel themselves sufficient and ready in this regard. It would be helpful to focus attention to the subjects regarding the family-school cooperation in the undergraduate programs and to provide the students with the opportunity to practice it in the Community Service Practices course. We should not only assess the students in terms of their cognitive skills, but also assess them in terms of their affective behaviors and we should make this assessment realistically with the family-community-school cooperation. Having knowledge of how children learn will be helpful to us in teaching values. We may have given harm to the learning ability of the children with some of the education methods we used (like root learning).

Children need model behaviors rather than verbal warnings. They can learn abstract subjects through the use of concrete objects. Especially during the early childhood, it is necessary to endear the value referenced behaviors and the adults exhibiting these behaviors to the children instead of teaching them values. The first condition of achieving all of these is a sincere and affectionate family with honor and strong personality.

Adoption and imitation of undesirable people and behaviors by the children is only possible temporarily. During the period of teaching values to the children, we should use the method of endearing and voluntariness instead of shaping and imposing. We should set emotional and contradictory behaviors aside and be realistic and coherent. It is not possible for the preschoolers to learn values by reading books. Therefore, we should pay attention to choosing the subjects corresponding the real life and using a plain and understandable language free from figurative meanings and symbols. The way to do these is to use stories and tales appropriate for children. The best gift to give them is to teach them the values that will give meaning to their life. Let's finish with a quote from Salzman and a hadith related to the subject: "Raising a good child is better than a wealth full of treasures; because they are living treasures." (Salzman, 2004:7). "No parent can give a child a better gift than good manners." (Tirmizî, "Birr"/ 33)

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