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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Research Article

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Abstract

This paper focused on teachers' personal stories to determine the pedagogical function and impact of children's literature. This study employed a life-story interview approach within a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology. The sample consisted of ten teachers from different branches. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using thematic and narrative structure approaches. The narrative structure consisted of three components: problem, activities, and denouement. Participants' life stories were thematically analyzed. The results show that teachers' observations and efforts help students recognize their problems. Teachers who associate their own stories with children's books lead to positive outcomes for themselves and their students. This experience helps students become aware of themselves and their problems and surrounding while helping teachers transform themselves individually and professionally. Therefore, children's books are pedagogically crucial for both students and teachers. This result shows that we should first raise educators' awareness of the pedagogical meaning and value of children's literature. Future narrative inquiries should focus on students' stories to determine the impact of children's literature on children.

Keywords: Children's literature, pedagogical function, teacher story, narrative inquiry

1. Introduction

Children's books confer experiences of aesthetic pleasure to children and help them develop different skill sets. Children's books encourage children to develop awareness and understand others because forging a bond with children's books is critical for children. According to Sawyer (2012), literary works enrich children's lives, transform them into competent students and considerate adults, and help them find meaning in life.

Children's literature is different from adult literature in many respects. Children's literature is a type of literature created by adults for children based on their interests, needs, developmental characteristics, and expectations. Apart from recreational or leisure-time purposes, children's literature focuses also on education (Dilidüzgün, 2004; Hunt, 2005; Gürel, Temizyürek, and Şahbaz, 2007; Şahin, Turan, Dursunoğlu, and Celepoğlu, 2007; Demirel, 2010; Sever, 2013a; Aslan, 2019; Şen, 2021). Children exposed to children's books are more likely to develop conceptually, emotionally, and mentally and add new experiences to their repertoires (Glazer, 2000).

Unlike adult literature, children's literature has a pedagogical side to it. According to Sever (2013b), children's literature plays a critical role in child development because it introduces literature to children and helps them develop language awareness and a culture of literacy. According to Yalçın and Aytaş (2017), children's literature consists of three components: pedagogy, linguistic text, and visuality (arrangement, composition, and illustration).

Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo (2020) argue that children's literature offers young readers three possibilities: educational role, didactic aspect, and psychological value. The educational role helps children create a value system, the didactic aspect motivates them to participate in educational activities, and the psychological value allows them to resolve inner conflicts and everyday life problems. Sullivan and Strang (2002) focus on bibliotherapy as a literacy-based method of treatment and state that psychologists and teachers can use literary works to help children cope with social and emotional issues.

Due to its pedagogical side, children's literature is used by different disciplines for different purposes. Research shows that children's books educate children about characters (Almerico, 2014), peace (Erhan, 2020), environment (Aslan, 2015), and emotions (Sullivan & Strang, 2002). Children's books also shape their gender perceptions and expectations (Lee & Chin, 2021), help them develop empathy skills (Akyüz, 2014; Kaya and Erdem, 2020), and raise their awareness of cultural norms (Burke, Snow, and Egan Kiigemagi, 2019).

Unlike other literary genres, children's literature offers children numerous opportunities (Jaques, 2015). Therefore, children's books are pedagogical tools that can be used in educational settings. Pedagogical opportunities offered by children's literature to young readers are as follows (Coats, 2004; Sawyer, 2012; Sever, 2013a; Flagan, 2014; Howart, 2014; Jaques, 2015; Aslan, 2019):

Children's books

- Help children recognize individuality and develop positive self-images and emotions regardless of the genre (poem, novel, picture book, etc.)
- Help young readers socialize and enculturate.
- Encourage children to ask various ontological questions, such as "Who am I?"
- Provide patterns and signifiers that help children define themselves and "the other."
- Help children get to know life and human nature.
- Help children hold values, learn about different cultures, and discover the bond between people.

Children are affected by literary works more than adults because they are still at the beginning of their lives and have limited experience. Every literary work offers a new world of opportunities that transform the way children view the world and themselves. Especially the morals and dilemmas in literary works encourage children to use aesthetic blueprints to overcome their problems.

Going beyond mere discursive articulations to uncover the impact of children's books on young readers allows us to appreciate both the nature and the pedagogical value of those works.

2. The Significance of the Study

Narrative inquiry is a relatively new branch of qualitative research that requires further studies. It presents important results for researchers, readers, and participants. It first allows researchers to make use of first-hand experiences to access in-depth information about a research topic. This study also employed narrative inquiry to focus on teachers' personal stories to illustrate the significance and pedagogical value of children's literature in education. We think that this study will give readers an idea of how and in what situations they can use children's books in education. The study also helped participants reflect on their experiences, elaborate on their stories, and approach them more consciously. Participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, and P6) explained this as *"I've never shared this experience of mine with anyone. We overlook these small but important things. I've come to notice it when I talked to you. It*

turned out to be there when you asked me about it. I'd never talked to anyone about it before.” (P5)

To our knowledge, this is the first study to focus on teachers' personal stories to determine the pedagogical function of children's books. We think that it will fill a gap in the literature and provide stakeholders (teachers, parents, academics, etc.) with the opportunity to figure out what criteria to consider to benefit from children's books and to conduct the reading process.

3. Research Purpose

This study focused on participants' experiences to determine how they used children's books to help their students cope with problems. The main research question was, “What kind of experiences do teachers have regarding the pedagogical function of children's books?” The study sought answers to the following sub-research questions:

1. How did the teachers notice their students' problems?
2. What did the teachers experience when choosing children's books and getting their students to read them?
3. What are the outcomes of this experience for teachers and students?

4. Method

This section first provided details about the story of the research and the role of the researcher and then addressed the research design, participants' characteristics, and data collection and analysis.

4.1. The Story of the Research

Teachers and students have exciting and never-to-be-forgotten stories about each other. Analyzing those stories provides valid and reliable information about education and stakeholders (administrators, overseers, teachers, students, etc.) (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2017). The researcher embarked on this research when he realized that teachers had experiences with the pedagogical function of children's books.

This idea was evident to the researcher as he had delivered the “Fictional Reality in Children's Literature” course for nearly three years within the scope of the Turkish thesis master's program at the Institute of Educational Sciences of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. Some graduate students, who were teaching at various schools, took the course and shared interesting and valuable stories about the impact of children's books on students. Therefore, the researcher decided to interview teachers with such experiences to determine the impacts of children's books on students. He first conducted a literature review on children's literature and saw numerous empirical, theoretical, descriptive, or interview-based studies on this topic. However, he realized that there was no published narrative inquiry looking into it. Therefore, he decided to focus on personal stories to reveal the pedagogical impact of children's literature on students in formal learning environments. He embarked on this research to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on personal narratives.

4.2. The Role of the Researcher

The primary role of the researcher was to reach teachers with experiences of the pedagogical function of children's literature and interview them to collect personal stories that fit the purpose of the study. He was also responsible for conveying the stories and giving them a systematic and chronological structure. He was in constant contact with participants, exchanging ideas with them throughout the study. Participants were actively engaged in the whole process.

4.3. Research Design

This study was a narrative inquiry, which is a qualitative research design. Narrative inquiry is used by researchers interested in focusing on people's stories to learn about their experiences of a subject or situation (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, and Demirel, 2013, s. 262). Narrative inquiry appreciates people's stories and collects data either on people themselves or connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramatic dimensions of their experiences (Patton, 2014). This study adopted the design of "life-story inquiry," which is a type of narrative inquiry. Life-story depicts one's whole life, while a personal experience-based story is concerned with personal experiences in one or more chapters, special situations, or common folklore (Denzin, 1989 cited in Cresswell, 2015). This study was a life story-based narrative inquiry because it focused on teachers' personal stories to shed light on the pedagogical impact of children's literature on students.

4.3.1. Research stages

Narrative inquiry consists of seven stages: (1) determining research purpose and choosing a topic, (2) reaching participants with experience of the topic, (3) determining research questions, (4) determining the role of the researcher and obtaining permissions, (5) choosing the ideal data collection method and collecting data, (6) organizing and verifying the stories in collaboration with participants, and (7) reporting the data (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, and Demirel, 2013). This study also followed these stages:

Stage 1: The researcher chose the topic of the pedagogical function of children's literature and teachers' related experiences.

Stage 2: The basic philosophy of narrative inquiry is to reach people with stories that fit the research purpose and to compile those stories. The researcher interviewed many teachers and asked them if they had any personal stories about the research topic, to which ten teachers responded positively. The teacher asked them if they would like to participate in the study. They all agreed to participate. Therefore, the sample consisted of ten teachers recruited using purposive sampling. It is a type of sampling used in qualitative research to target certain individuals or groups to obtain as much information about the topic of interest as possible (Patton, 2014). Table 1 shows the participants' descriptive characteristics.

Table 1. *Descriptive characteristics*

	Participant	Gender	Age (years)	Work experience (years)	Branch
1.	P1	Man	28	4	Turkish teacher
2.	P2	Woman	33	10	Preschool teacher
3.	P3	Woman	25	3	Turkish teacher
4.	P4	Woman	28	4	Turkish teacher
5.	P5	Man	26	3	Turkish teacher
6.	P6	Woman	32	9	Turkish teacher
7.	P7	Man	39	17	Classroom teacher
8.	P8	Man	30	8	Turkish language and literature teacher
9.	P9	Woman	25	3	Preschool teacher
10.	P10	Woman	27	4	Turkish teacher

The sample consisted of six women and four men. Six of them were Turkish teachers, two preschool teachers, one classroom teacher, and one Turkish language and literature teacher. Participants had a mean age of 29.3 years (min: 25 and max: 39). Six participants were younger than 30. Participants had a mean work experience of 6.5 years (min: 3 and max: 17). Eight participants had work experience of more than ten years. Therefore, we can state that participants had current stories.

Stage 3: The researcher developed three research questions.

Stage 4: The researcher identified his role and received consent from participants. He also obtained the necessary permissions to conduct the study.¹

Stage 5: The research decided to use the interview technique to collect data. Table 2 presents the details of the interviews.

Table 2. *Details of the interviews*

No	Participant	Interview Duration		
		First Interview	Second Interview	Third Interview
1.	P1	23 min 20 sec	19 min 38 sec	18 min 49 sec
2.	P2	19 min 56 sec	18 min 25 sec	15 min 02 sec
3.	P3	30 min 23 sec	25 min 18 sec	22 min 28 sec
4.	P4	29 min 32 sec	20 min 36 sec	22 min 35 sec
5.	P5	20 min 55 sec	15 min 39 sec	15 min 45 sec
6.	P6	19 min 46 sec	20 min 18 sec	18 min 42 sec
7.	P7	21 min 40 sec	20 min 13 sec	15 min 30 sec
8.	P8	19 min 44 sec	15 min 52 sec	16 min 23 sec
9.	P9	28 min 44 sec	16 min 25 sec	17 min 25 sec
10.	P10	20 min 45 sec	21 min 10 sec	14 min 22 sec

The researcher contacted participants through email or by phone. He interviewed each participant three times, which fits the nature of the narrative inquiry. In the first interviews, he compiled stories. In the second interviews, he reorganized the stories and structured them. In the third interviews, he had all participants ratify the themes and categories that emerged.

Stage 6: Retelling stories is another stage of narrative inquiry because participants generally tell their stories without paying attention to chronology. Therefore, the researcher can rearrange the stories. This process involves compiling stories, analyzing them based on keywords (place-time, storyline, and event), and arranging them chronologically (Cresswell, 2015). Each narrative is based on balance, imbalance, and rebalance (Todorov, 2012), to which the research also subscribed when rearranging the stories. The balance part was concerned with “the student's situation before a problem.” The imbalance part was “the teacher recognizing the source and content of the student's problem.” The rebalance part was “the teacher using children’s books to help the student overcome the problem and the

¹ The study was approved by the Social Sciences and Humanities Editorial Ethics Committee of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (Date: 25. 03. 2021 and No: E-85157263-604.01.02-37597). The Ethics Committee decreed that the research adhered to Social and Human Ethical Rules and Principles.

implications of the experience for the teacher and the student.” The researcher worked with participants to retell the stories. For example, one of the participants (P1) was more specific about the timeline in the second interview than in the first one because, in the second interview, he added that what he had experienced had taken place in the fall semester of 2016-2017 academic year.

Stage 7: This is the last stage where the researcher reported the research.

4.4. Data collection method

In narrative inquiries, data are generally collected using interviews, storytelling, oral history, autobiography, biography, and observation (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2016). The data in this study were collected through interviews using a semi-structured interview form. In the semi-structured interview technique, the researcher develops questions to which he/she has a right to make partial corrections or adjustments. In fact, the researcher and the respondent can rearrange the questions together. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are conducted in qualitative research (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2017).

The researcher followed four steps to develop the semi-structured interview form. First, he conducted pilot interviews with three participants (P1, P3, P5) and made necessary modifications according to the research purpose. Second, he consulted three experts (one Assoc. Prof., and two Assoc. Prof. Dr.) for intelligibility and relevance and made necessary modifications (additions and deletions) to the form. For example, one of the experts suggested that two more questions be added to the form (What steps did you take to resolve this issue?” and “Did the student make an association between the event in the book and her/her own life?”). Another expert stated that two questions were alike (“What kind of feedback did the student give you?” and “What kind of reaction did he give to you?”) and suggested that one of them be removed. Third, the researcher conducted interviews with two participants and finalized the form based on their feedback. The two participants stated that they did not understand the part “dimensions” in the question “The changes in the student were related to what dimensions of the book?” Therefore, they suggested that the question be reworded. The researcher added an explanation in the form stating that the “dimensions” referred to the components of the character, theme, subject, and storyline of the book. Fourth, the researcher finalized the form and started conducting interviews.

4.5. Data Analysis

There is no one formula or way of analyzing stories in qualitative research. Thinking of data as a narrative allows the researcher to develop different analytical strategies (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; cited in Merriam, 2009). Therefore, various strategies can be used to analyze stories in narrative inquiries. According to Riessman (cited in Cresswell, 2015), narratives can be analyzed in three ways: thematic, structural, and dialogic. The thematic analysis focuses on what is conveyed by a narrative. The structural analysis focuses on the facts behind or the nature of what is said. The dialogic analysis focuses on whom the story guides. According to Webster and Mertova (2007), narrative inquiry concentrates on the critical events that make up a narrative, or the scene, storyline, character, and events that outline the narrative. The purpose of narrative analysis is to unearth storylines or common themes. Yussen and Ozcan (1997) draw attention to the narrative structure approach, which makes it possible for the researcher to analyze stories within the framework of five components: character, setting, problem, activities, and denouement.

This study employed the thematic and narrative structure approaches to analyze the narratives within the framework of three basic elements: (1) problem (recognizing a

problem), (2) activities (choosing and reading a children's book), and (3) denouement (resolutions arising from experience for related parties).

The structural analysis yielded themes and codes under the three basic elements (problem, activities, and denouement). Content analysis was used to develop the themes and codes. Content analysis involves examining the content of a text or document and then categorizing data into lower and upper classes (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2017). Categories should also answer the research question(s) (Merriam, 2009). Three themes and eight categories were developed based on four steps: (1) obtaining codes from statements in narratives, (2) reviewing the codes and receiving feedback from participants, (3) grouping the codes under categories, and (4) grouping the categories under themes. Figure 1 shows the details of the narrative structure, themes and categories.

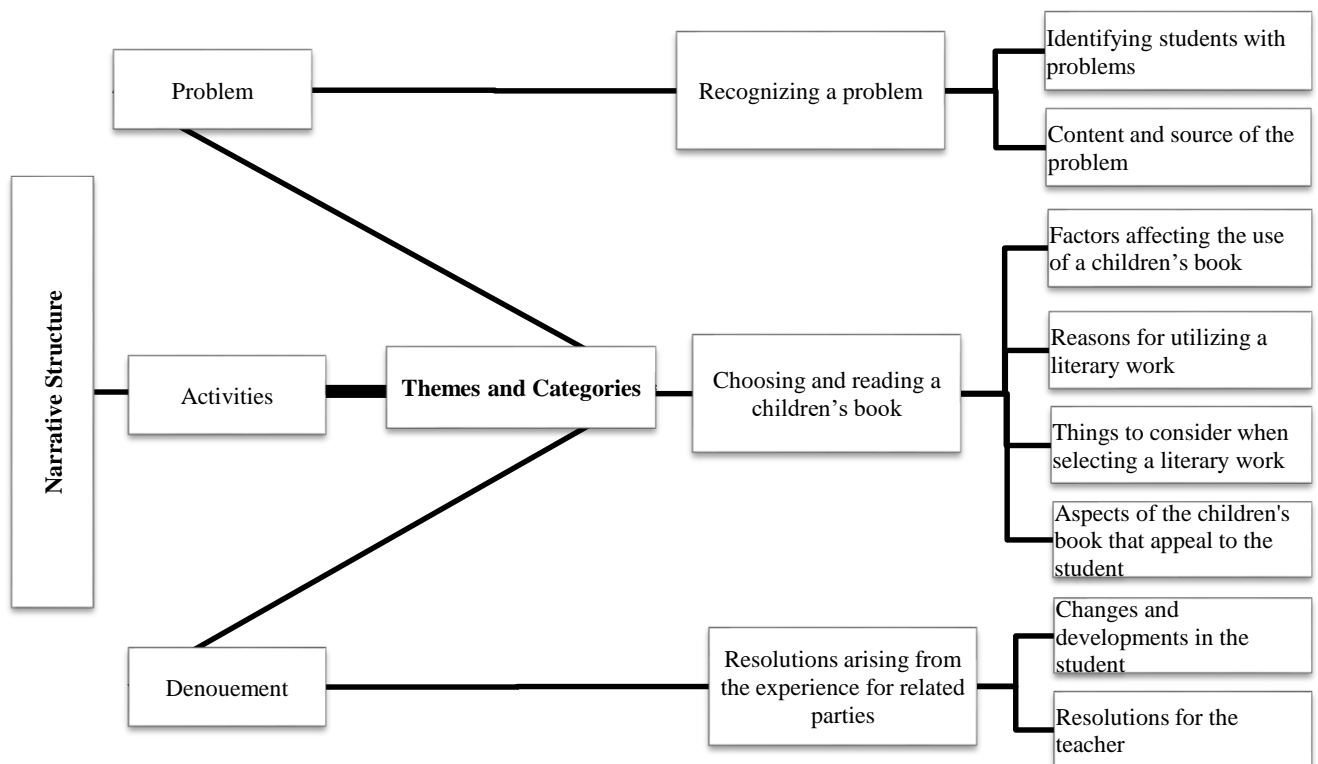


Figure 1. Narrative Structure, Themes and Categories

4.6. Validity and Reliability

There are several ways to check validity and reliability in qualitative research: (1) detailing the research process (data collection, analysis, and interpretation), (2) providing direct quotes, and (3) having participants or colleagues confirm the data are some functional ways of testing validity and reliability (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The researcher followed all these three steps.

Calculating intercoder correlation is a way of testing reliability in content analysis. Intercoder reliability can be calculated using the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman: $\Delta = C \div (C + \partial) \times 100$ where Δ is the reliability coefficient, C is the number of agreements, and ∂ is the number of disagreements. Interrater reliability of greater than 80% indicates good reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher used the formula to calculate intercoder reliability with the help of a colleague. The researcher asked a different researcher

to analyze three randomly selected stories (P3, P5, P9) and then calculated the interrater reliability. The result yielded interrater reliability of 84% [$48 / (48+9) \times 100$], indicating good reliability.

5. Results

This section discussed the results within the framework of the narrative structure, themes [(1) recognizing a problem, (2) choosing and reading a children's book, and (3) resolutions arising from experience for related parties] and categories.

5.1. Problem: Recognizing a Problem

Participants recognized students' problems in two steps. First, they made observations and then got in touch with different people (the student, parents of the student, or an expert).

5.1.1. Identifying students with problems

Participants identified students with problems either during class (P3, P4, P7, P8) or by talking to them or their parents (P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10). They also paid attention to the changes in their behavior (P1, P2, P4) or were guided by an expert (P2). The results showed that observation played a key role in the identification of students with problems.

P1: It was the first semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. I was teaching at Bitlis Hizan Regional Boarding School for Girls, which was a village school. One day during recess, I saw a student of mine; she was 12 back then; she seemed kind of sad and sobby. It was not typical of her. She was a hardworking student who was always chirpy and happy.

P4: It was in 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. There was this student of mine, a fifth grader, who had lost her dad when she was very young. There are these listening texts that we have to cover in Turkish class. One of the songs was "Tell me a story, Dad." They [students] were supposed to listen to it and then share their feelings. I opened the page. She was sitting in one of the back seats. I already felt very bad when I saw her face, but I had to do the activity; I mean, it's in the curriculum. But I just couldn't call upon her to speak because I saw that her eyes were all misty with tears, looking outside the window.

P5: It was 2018, three years ago, I was in Manisa, teaching at a secondary school in a village. It was my first assignment, and so I asked questions to students to get to know them. Back then, I had a 12-year-old female student, a sixth grader. I found out that she had lost her mom, and so she was living with her grandparents. The grandmother was showing her affection, so she and her grandmother had a natural relationship. But my student was too quickly heartbroken by her grandmother. One day, they had a fight, she told me that they did.

5.1.2. The content and source of the problem

Participants talked about seven problems that their students faced: family (P1, P4, P5, P6, P10), low academic performance and attention deficit (P7), technological addiction (P8), fear (P2, P9), and exclusion (P3). The results showed that most students experienced family problems, such as conflict (P1, P5, P10), and father's death (P4) or abandoning the family (P6).

P1: The student I'm talking about is a female student of mine. Her father catches a partridge and keeps it in a cage. He always keeps it with him because he wants to sell it. He is a rancher anyway. One day, she wants to play with the partridge, but she lets it

out of its cage. So, her dad gets furious at her. She was still shaken by that even at school.

P6: I talked to my student during recess. I asked her why her parents didn't turn up for the parent-teacher meeting and if she had something she wanted to talk about. "Ma'am, I don't have a dad," she said. I thought he was dead. But before I had the time to say I was sorry for her loss, she said that he'd abandoned them.

Fear was another problem that participants faced. Two participants (P2, P9) recommended their students to read children's books to conquer their fear.

P2: I had this student who had two operations when he was small, so he was afraid of doctors. His parents had told me about it. The book "Doktor Çantası" [The Doctor's Bag] helped him conquer his fear. He loved the book so much that it was his favorite. That's what he told me.

P9: I had this student. One day, his sister came to school to talk to me. She said that he couldn't even go to the bathroom by himself. She said that he was standing in the corridor and calling them to take him to the bathroom, that he was not leaving his parents' side, and always wanted to hug them and sleep in with them. She said that he didn't have that problem in the past, that he was able to sleep alone. So, it was something new. So, she was asking me for advice. She knew I was working in the field of children's literature. I wanted to think about it first and consulted a teacher of mine about what to do.

One of the participants (P8) stated that he turned to children's books to help a student who was addicted to his smartphone and video games:

P8: I was teaching at a private secondary school two years ago. I had this student who was an eighth grader. He goes to high school now. He was the only son. He had eight or nine sisters. So, the parents did everything he wanted. He asked for a smartphone, and they got him one. They both are working parents. So, the kid just kept playing games and got addicted to his phone and mobile games.

Another participant (P7) noted that one of his students had academic problems. He also stated that the student was prejudiced against some courses and activities (writing) and had difficulty concentrating:

P7: One of my students was extremely prejudiced against some courses, one of which was Turkish. She didn't like it at all and had a hard time expressing himself during class. Like I said, she had some bad experiences in terms of writing and comprehending instructions. She was skipping letters when writing.

Students also faced exclusion. One of the participants (P3) talked about two students of hers being excluded by their peers. Therefore, she used children's books to teach her students to respect differences and appreciate diversity:

P3: It was 2017-2018. It was my first assigned position. I had these two students, one of them was deaf, and the other was on the spectrum. They were being excluded by their peers.

5.2. Activities: Choosing and Reading a Children's book

5.2.1. Factors affecting the use of a children's book

There were six factors affecting what children's books participants chose or recommended. Those factors were the teacher's academic background (P2, P4, P6, P9),

suggestions that do not work in some situations (P4, P5, P6, P9), personal experience and readings (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10), professional responsibility (P2, P6), recommendations from others (P1, P2, P4, P7), and belief in the difference between adults and children (P6). The results showed that participants recommended books based on their preferences, interests, or convictions:

P1: The girl was distraught; she was still in shock and had been that way for a couple of days. So, I was like, ‘what can I do to help her?’ and I decided to read a children’s book to her. I’ve been interested in children’s literature since college anyway.

P4: The courses I took in college and the books I read got me interested in children’s literature. When I was taking those courses, I got to talk to kids, and I realized that suggestions like “you shouldn’t be afraid,” “you are a grown man/woman,” or “you’re ten years old, you should not be afraid because people your age are not supposed to be afraid” do not work at all.

Some participants (P1, P2, P4, P7) consulted with experts or friends before they recommended books to their students:

P7: Like I said, it was an expert who pointed it out to me. I had no idea about it before. I would just go and get some ordinary books without giving any thought to it.

Some participants (P4, P5, P6, P9) remarked that giving advice was simply not enough to help students overcome their problems. Therefore, they turned to children’s books:

P6: The kid told me that her father had left them. I knew my words wouldn’t make any difference. You know, you can’t comprehend the gravity of a situation before you find yourself in it. You just can’t understand how painful something is before it happens to you. So, you should follow in someone’s footsteps if you want to know what they feel. No words could fully help me live through the pain of abandonment she was going through. Even if I said something, she would be like, “the teacher is doing nothing but give me advice,” and that advice would not do her any good.

P9: The courses on children’s literature got me to realize that saying things like “you shouldn’t be afraid,” “you’re a grown-up now,” or “kids your age are not afraid” would do no good. Only implicit methods can get kids to cope with their fear and trauma. Children’s literature was also a functional tool in that sense.

5.2.2. Reasons for using a children’s book

Participants used children’s books to stimulate their students' senses (P5), improve their academic performance (P7), entertain them (P5), make them feel mentally at ease (P1, P2), get them to face their problems (P4, P5, P9), serve as positive role models for them (P5, P6, P9), help them develop a culture of literacy (P3, P7), make them aware of things (P2, P3, P10), and give them hope (P6).

Participants used children’s books to encourage students to face their problems and provide them with characters they could identify with:

P1: If I had a student with a problem, the first thing I would do would be to refer him/her to the school counselor. But back then, the school counselor was on a leave of absence, and so I thought books might just do the job. I decided to give the kid some books because I thought they could, indirectly, help him feel more at ease on the inside.

P4: I recommended a student of mine the book “Babamın Gözleri Kedi Gözleri” [My Dad Has Cat Eyes]. I wanted her to face her problem. I wanted her to realize that there are others who were abandoned by their fathers.

P5: Saying stuff doesn't always work. I thought that the important thing was appealing to multiple senses and having someone so the kid could put herself in their shoes. I asked my student to put herself in the shoes of someone who lived with her grandma or just loved her dearly. At that point, I thought of a book I'd read before, which was "Anneannem Askere Gidiyor" [My Grandma Joins the Army] by Muzaffer İzgü.

5.2.3. Things to consider when selecting a children's book

When choosing the best books for their students, participants paid attention to the subject (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10), age-appropriateness (P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9), language and narration (P1, P2), message (P1, P6), images (P2), characters (P3), publisher (P4, P9), author (P4, P7, P9), and their own views (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9):

The results showed that the "subject" was the most important criterion on which participants focused to choose the best books for their students. They chose books that directly or indirectly addressed the problems their students faced:

P1: I thought that the book "Bisküvi Kutusundaki Martı" [The Seagull in the Biscuit Box] by Doğan Gündüz was very relatable to what she was going through, and so I gave her that book. I thought that she could relate to the book.

P2: The student was afraid of doctors, so we read the book "The Doctor's Bag" together. In fact, he read it several times; it was his favorite book. Now he loves doctors. He used to be terrified of them, but now he loves them.

P6: I gave my student the book "Fadiş" by Gülten Dayıoğlu. Fadiş was younger than she was, but I wanted her to see that there were others going through what she was going through.

The results showed that participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9) chose books they had read before or had positive opinions about:

P3: I knew what the book "Martıya Uçmayı Öğreten Kedi" [The Cat That Taught the Seagull How to Fly] was about. I can't forget about that book; I really love it because it made a strong impression on me.

5.2.4. Aspects of children's books that appeal to students

According to participants' observations, the aspects that were appealing to students were the characters (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8), relatability (P1, P2, P4, P6), subject (P3, P4, P6, P8, P9), storyline (P5, P7), theme (P1), and style (P4). Participants stated that they could tell that by the way students expressed their opinions about the books:

P6: I asked my student whether she read the book about two weeks after I gave it to her. She said, "Ma'am, it's my third time." So, she read it once and then read it again to let it settle in. I was like, "Well then, what do you think about it? Would you like to talk about it?" She said that Fadiş was very much like her. I was like, "Is that so? Why do you think she's like you?" Then, she told me all about it.

P8: I gave my student the book "Çocuk Kalbi" [Heart] by Edmondo De Amicis. He talked about how the young protagonist in the book was sorry for what he did and apologized for it. For example, my student talked about the kids playing snowballs and said, "Sir, we should also play snowballs."

P10: I got my student to read the book "My left Foot" by Christy Brown. It has a great theme and plot. But my student concentrated mostly on the character and what he was going through, and his lifestyle. The mother is a strong character who has a great

impact on her kid. My student said, “If I were in that situation, I mean if I had to use my feet to do most things and if I couldn't talk, my parents couldn't care less about me. They would just dump me off and tell me not to show my face to others.”

Anthropomorphism was another important aspect. Participants stated that anthropomorphic characters were as appealing to students as human characters:

P3: The book “The Cat That Taught the Seagull How to Fly” had a greater impact on students because the characters were animals. They were impressed by such things like Zorba the Cat keeping his promise and taking care of the egg after the death of Kengah, the mother of Lucky the baby seagull. Things like that made them more aware of things. They made the kids realize that it's okay to have friends that are different from us.

5.3. Denouement: The Resolutions Arising from the Experience for Related Parties

5.3.1. Changes and developments in students

Participants stated that the experience made students feel at ease on the inside (P1, P4, P6, P9), boosted their confidence (P6, P9), taught them to respect differences (P3), made them more aware of social values (P8, P10), and helped overcome their problems (P1, P2, P4, P6, P8, P9), and develop a culture of literacy (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9), and self-expression (P7, P8), communication (P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9), and concentration skills (P7).

Participants focused mainly on two concrete impacts of the books on students. First, they were able to overcome their problems. Second, they forged a strong connection between the books and their own lives:

P8: I gave my students adventure books, like “From the Earth to the Moon,” “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,” and “Journey to the Center of the Earth” by Jules Verne. He loved the books because he likes digital games. I monitored him throughout the year. He made significant progress by the end of the year. He even put his phone aside during study and then stopped bringing it with him altogether and had less and less screen time.

P9: Back then, I gave my students the books “Karanlıktan Korkan Baykuş” [The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark] and “Kitaplardan Korkan Çocuk” [Papirofobia No Quiero Leer!] by Susanna Tamaro and another book whose title I can't think of now. All those books left an impression on her. They helped her overcome her fear and develop a reading habit.

Participants also noted that classroom or teacher-student discussions enhanced the impact of the books on students:

P3: There is no such thing as “I read one book, and it changed my life.” You must talk to the student a lot before and after she reads a book. If she says, “They [the characters] are different, too” after she reads the book and does all the activities and if she says that with reference to the seagull and cat characters in the book, then it means the book has changed something in her.

Sometimes it takes a while for children's books to affect young readers. It depends on the gravity of their problems and their reading habits and personality traits. One of the participants (P1) stated that his student, who was going through a tough time, had a reading habit, and therefore, it took her a very short time to change her perspective after she read the book. However, another participant (P8) noted that it took some time before he noticed any change in his student after she read the book he recommended.

P1: The cat was trying to save the seagull. My student was impressed by the cat helping the seagull return to its natural habitat and the sky. I saw some changes in her. After she read the book, she told me, "Sir, even though my dad was mad at me, I think I did the right thing by setting the partridge free because it belongs to nature, to the sky." The change in her was evident in her words and behaviors as well. She was not sad anymore.

P8: At first, he didn't want to read the book; he read it because I asked him to, but it turned into a habit with time. He asked me for more books. He was like, "Sir, I'm almost done with the book, can you give me another one, please?" or "I like this book" or "Do you have any more books that are like it?" So, he kept asking for more and more books. So, we made great progress both reading habit-wise and addiction-wise. It took him about one and a half years to go through that change.

The primary objective of books is not to provide children with information. However, some books can help them learn about phenomena, situations, objects, or beings. One participant (P1) stated that his student learned from the book that the seagull was a bird:

P1: My student didn't know that the seagull was a bird; she learned it from the book. After reading the book, she asked me what a seagull was, and I explained to her. This way, she learned that the seagull was a bird.

One participant (P10) remarked that her student developed an awareness of social prejudices after reading the book.

P10: I'm sure my parents would be ashamed of me; they would be worried about what others would say about me and so they wouldn't let me out. I mean, they wouldn't let me go out; they would be like, "Why don't you just stay at home? We'll take care of you." But what if I wanted to see what's outside; I'm sure they would shut me in so that others wouldn't talk about me or wouldn't sideline me.

5.3.2. Resolutions for teachers

Participants stated that this experience changed how they viewed children's literature (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10). They were more interested in it and made better book choices and recommendations (P1, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10). It also changed the way they delivered classes (P3, P4, P5) and communicated with students (P1, P4, P6, P9). They integrated children's books into their lectures more and communicated better with their students. The experience also changed the way they perceived parenting (P1). They were more careful about asking personal questions in the classroom. They also discovered different ways to get to know their students (P6):

P4: This experience got me more interested in children's literature and doing research. It's taught me that I can reach students through books. I mean, instead of preaching, I can recommend books to get into their worlds and find solutions to their problems. From a professional perspective, I've become more interested in children's literature, and I respect it more.

P5: After this experience, I started to read children's books to my students. To me, the greatest impact of this experience is that it made me realize that I should integrate children's books into my classes and my life.

P6: This experience taught me not to ask some questions in the classroom, like, "What do your parents do for a living?" After that day, I talked about parents; I mean, I talked about the parents who cared for the kids. This has made a huge impression on me.

P8: Here's what I've noticed: I started to find ten to 15 books to recommend to my students every year, especially for the summer. First, I read the books to find out what they are about and to see whether they are appropriate for my students in terms of language and content, and then I recommend the ones I think are worth reading.

P10: At first, I had no idea about what to do after I got my students to read books. This experience got me thinking about it. Now I do research on books, regardless of class. I read the books or blurbs before I recommend them to my students.

One participant (P1) stated that this experience affected him not only pedagogically or professionally but also as a prospective father. He noted that the experience made him more aware of himself.

P1: Childhood is a delicate time, and I feel strongly when it comes to children. To me, this experience is not only about books but also about being a parent. I'll be a dad soon, so I think that this experience will do me good in many aspects, like, especially when it comes to looking at things through the eyes of a child.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This study focused on teachers' personal stories to determine the pedagogical function of children's books. The results showed that such books produced positive outcomes for both teachers and students. Problem detection and book selection depended on the academic and intellectual background and personal effort. Participants who were more interested in and knowledgeable of children's literature chose better books with greater impact on students. Participants' awareness of children's books is consistent with the literature. Research shows that teachers or preservice teachers attribute a pedagogical meaning to children's books as they recognize that such books contribute to children's development (Ulusoy and Altun, 2018; Hasırcı, 2017)

Participants stated that students' problems were mostly of family origin. Research also shows that students mostly have family problems (Baysal, 2009; Akman, Baydemir, Akyol, Arslan, and Kent-Kükütçü, 2011; Özer, Bozkurt, and Tuncay, 2014; Aküzüm and Nazlı, 2017; Ata Doğan, Yıldız, Atış Akyol, and Akman, 2021). Teachers make eye contact, observe, or talk to parents to identify the problems their students might be facing (Temiz, 2020; Kılıç, Kalkan and Avcı, 2021). This is also consistent with our result. Participants talked to students, observed their behavior in the classroom, or consulted with experts to identify their problems.

Most teachers do not use books to address their students' problems (Baysal, 2009; Aküzüm and Nazlı, 2017; Ata Doğan, Yıldız, Atış-Akyol, and Akman, 2021; Kılıç, Kalkan, and Avcı, 2021). Only a handful of teachers turn to story-reading activities to help their students cope with their problems (Temiz, 2020). In general, teachers who think highly of children's literature and know about it are more likely to use children's books in their classes. Individual readings and academic experiences made our participants more aware of children's literature, and therefore, they attributed a pedagogical meaning, value, and function to children's literature and used such books to help their students solve their problems.

Reedy and Carvalho (2021) argue that educators do not fully allow students to choose the books they want to read. They conducted a study on 57 students at the age of five and found that students who were allowed to choose the books they wanted to read enjoyed reading more. Therefore, they have concluded that educators should consider students' preferences when it comes to reading. On the other hand, our participants chose books based on their own preferences and judgments. Only two participants (P2, P8) took students' preferences into

account, which is probably because those two teachers work at schools with high socioeconomic levels. The other participants chose the books themselves and lent them to students. This trend may be due to conventional understanding on the part of teachers and socio-economic level on the part of students. Nevertheless, the books had positive impacts on students, which suggests that participants were able to choose high-quality books.

Children's books can educate, heal, and teach children (Pulimeno, Piscitelli, and Colazzo, 2020). Participants observed that the students who read the books they recommended overcame their problems and displayed positive behavior. This result is consistent with the literature. For example, Kim and Yang (2021) found that critical literacy activities supported by children's books helped preschoolers (n=24) explore their own ideas, construct textual meaning, and shape their own voices.

Heath, Smith, and Young (2017) reported that children's books promoted young children's social, mental, and emotional development. Our participants also observed that reading books resulted in changes in the mental status of their students. They noted that those who read books felt emotionally relieved and developed an awareness of social norms.

Teachers can help students make sense of textual worlds and their own lives by providing them with the opportunity to read and discuss what they read (Galda and Beach, 2001). Therefore, teachers should make sure that the book-reading process allows students to develop literacy skills and explore various topics (e.g., prejudice). This can encourage them to interact with books, acquire critical literacy skills, and develop a habit of reading (Kelly, Laminack, and Gould, 2020). What is more, talking to children about books ensures a bibliotherapeutic effect (Karagül, 2018). Our participants also pointed out that the conversations and discussions they had with the students about the books were necessary to magnify the impact of the books. To that end, they tried to create a space where the students could better internalize the books. Therefore, we can state that the discussions about the books helped the students recover from their initial negative psychological state.

Participants stated that the experience helped students bond with books and develop reading habits. The books led to such changes because they were quality and relatable books that responded to students' needs. Research also shows that appropriate and quality books motivate children to read (Dalboy, 2014; Batum, 2015).

Öztürk (2017) reported a positive correlation between reading habits and affective awareness. Our results also showed that the students who bonded with books developed a reading habit, recognized their problems, empathized more with others, and felt more self-confident. This transformative power of the books also helped improve teacher-student communication. Moreover, participants stated that this experience allowed them to form stronger bonds with students with problems.

Experimental studies show that children's books help children develop empathy skills (Akyüz, 2014; Reimer, 2019; Kaya and Erdem, 2020). In Blewitt et al. (2021), some educators pointed out that books could be effective in social and emotional learning. They stated that stories might help children understand what is happening around them and understand their own and others' feelings. These results support our findings. Our participants observed that students who established a bond with children's books were more likely to recognize their own and others' feelings and thoughts.

Studies show that children of different ages pay attention to characters in books. Children judge characters by their physical and personality traits (Jose and Brewer, 1984; Erdem, 2011). This result also supports our finding, indicating that most students with problems focused on the characters in the books they read.

Anthropomorphism is one of the ways to develop characters in children's books. Research shows that people establish a similarity between anthropomorphic and human characters. People utilize the same methods to understand both anthropomorphic fictional characters and humans in real life. They perceive anthropomorphic characters as social beings and follow social norms to understand them, resulting in emotional sensitivity (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Brown and Mclean, 2015; Li and Sung, 2021). Our participants also stated that the students were interested in both human characters and anthropomorphic characters. One participant (P3) noted that the anthropomorphic characters in the book made her student more aware of students with disabilities.

Burke, Snow, and Egan-Kiigemagi (2019) conducted a study on 346 students aged 5-12 years and observed that children's literature was an effective way of discussing national and global issues. Our participants also used children's books to solve children's problems and communicate with them, suggesting that children's literature turned into a functional tool. The books helped participants bond with their students and identify their problems.

7. Recommendations

We should raise teachers' and preservice teachers' awareness of the psychological and pedagogical impact of children's literature on students. We should let teachers know that they can use children's books to help their students overcome their problems. Teachers should be careful when choosing books and encourage their students to read quality books. They should also take their students' preferences into account. To that end, teachers or preservice teachers should be briefed on how to use children's books in various activities or situations. Lastly, future narrative inquiries should focus on students' narratives to determine the pedagogical effects of children's literature.

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