The Interface between Critical Thinking Strategies and Moral Development

Eleştirel Düşünme ve Ahlaki Gelişimin Örtüşümü

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Abstract: Fables can be excellent windows into the worlds of animals and human beings for children. Moreover, they are fun to read, discuss, envisage and personalize via storytelling. There have been many fable theorists who have reflected on the definition of fable and its different functions. John Locke recommended fables to teach language at a time when social concern was growing, particularly in education. In the same way, the fabulist La Fontaine also alluded to the instructive aspect or value of fables. Fables are kinds of instruction disguised under the allegory of an action with the purpose of moral teaching. One of the best known theories of moral development is associated with Lawrence Kohlberg (1971), and it suggests how art might lead to moral development. L. Kohlberg claims that there is empirical evidence which shows that there are universal ontogenetic trends towards the development of morality. He explicitly rejects views that moral development is the result of either teaching or maturation. He also argues that empirical studies have failed to confirm the findings of psychoanalytic schools; there are no correlations between parental modes of handling infantile drives and later behavior and attitudes. He holds, instead, that moral development is primarily the result of the interaction between the individual and their social environment, where role taking is of central importance. The aim of this paper is to show how Aesop's fables are used to enhance critical thinking strategies and to promote moral development.

Keywords: Fables, moral development, critical thinking strategies, education

Özet: Fabl çocuklar için hem hayvanlar hem de insan dünyasına açılan mükemmel bir pencere görevindedir. Bunun dışında, fablların, öykü anlatımıyla okunması, tartışılması, imgelenmesi ve kişileştirilmesi çok zevklidir. Fabl nedir ne değildir konusunda yazan sayısız eleştirmen ve düşünür vardır. Bunlardan biri olan John Locke sosyal konularda sorunun olduğu zamanlarda özellikle eğitimde dil öğretiminde fabl kullanımını tavsiye eder. Aynı şekilde La Fontaine de fablın eğitimsel yanını öne çıkartır. Gerçekte fabl, ahlaki ders verme amacıyla yazılmış olan ve alegorik özellik taşıyan öğütlerdir. Ahlaki gelişim kuramlarından birini savunan Lawrence Kohlberg sanatın ahlaki gelişmeye yardımcı olabileceğini belirtir. Ahlaki gelişimde evrensel eğilimler olduğunu gösteren deneysel deliller mevcut olduğunu ve ahlaki gelişimin öğretme veya büyümenin sonucu olduğunu savunan fikirlere şiddetle karşı çıkan L. Kohlberg (1971), deneysel çalışmaların psikoanalitik ekollerin bulgularını çürüttüğünü de savunmaktadır: ebeveynlerin çocuklarının dürtüleriyle başa çıkma yollarıyla kişilerin sonraki davranış ve tutumları arasında bir bağlantı yoktur. Daha çok bireyin sosyal çevresiyle olan iletişiminin sonucu olduğunu ve bireyin üstlendiği rollerin bu ahlaki gelişimde rol oynadığını belirtir. L. Kohlberg'in sanatın kişilere ahlak eğitimi verebileceği tezinden hareketle, bu çalışma, Aesop masallarının eleştirel düşünmeyi ve ahlaki gelişimi ne kadar etkileyebileceği üzerinedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Fabl, ahlaki gelişim, eleştirel düşünme şekilleri, eğitim

Fables can be excellent windows for children into the worlds of animals and human beings. Moreover, they are fun to read, discuss, envisage and personalize via storytelling. There have

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follows, in the commentary to the Walter of England manuscript: it is the duty of parents to teach their children that they follow them in morality and virtue through examples. The old teach the young through example and explicit instruction. Are we reading profanely or profoundly? All children's literature asks this question, though perhaps nowhere as pointedly as in the medieval Christian transformations of Aesop. That wolf, now not in sheep's but student's clothing, reappears again and again to symbolize wit and instruction pressed into the service of cupidity or vice. Those wolves are everywhere, filling the fables with their slyness. Sometimes their significance is bluntly put.

Perry (1959, 19-28) defines a fable in this manner: "*A fable . . . relates a fictitious event in the past for the obvious purpose of illustrating an ethical truth*" ; "*We must not confuse it with the popular animal story, of which it makes use but whose orientation is different*" ; and "*The teller of a fable is concerned before all else with the metaphorical meaning of his story, which he consciously aims to impart without delay*". The characteristics of a fable, then, are that it (a) is short in length, (b) features talking animals as a metaphor for human actors, and (c) involves morally significant actions and outcomes that are structured in a narrative to make a moral point. In the case of "*The Tortoise and the Hare*" the hare is overconfident, falls asleep, and loses the race to the steadily plodding tortoise. This narrative would seem to impart the moral message that, in the domain of human actions, perseverance will be rewarded but not sloth and overconfidence.

Fables are short. This restricts the genre to narratives that involve simple plans and outcomes. Their brevity made it possible to remember and recount these stories in the oral tradition in which they were invented. In addition, this brevity also partially accounts for why they are deemed appropriate for children today. The second characteristic, talking animals, marks the story as clearly fictional and hence potentially metaphorical and also contributes to its apparent relevance for the child reader (Jose, *et al*., 2005). But what about the proposed metaphorical discourse force of this genre? Are children able to comprehend and appreciate fables as stories of moral didactism?

A distinction has been made by Kintsch and van Dijk (1978; van Dijk, 1980) between knowledge of the causal and logical relationships within a narrative and knowledge of the general themes or abstract principles conveyed by a narrative. Goldman (1985, 269), in a study of children's understanding of Aesop fables, termed the first text-internal reasoning and the latter text-external reasoning. She argued that comprehension of the text-internal facts (the relationships among characters' goals, actions, and outcomes) does not necessarily "*ensure that higher order generalizations about the story can be or will be made*". Goldman found that young children were not able to generate adequate morals for two Aesop fables, but 3th grade and older children were able to do so. The young children, therefore, experienced difficulty in tying text-internal facts to text-external knowledge to generate morals for fables. This process is at the heart of comprehending the metaphoric message of fables, but how it works has not been explicated. First, we examine how metaphors are structured and operate as figurative devices.

Perry (1959) claimed that fables are intended to be metaphors. However, the structure of metaphors, which are typically one sentence in length, would on the surface seem to be quite dissimilar to a fable's structure. We argue that fables are metaphoric in the sense that the fable's narrative, which typically involves talking animals, is non-literal in that it conveys a message about human moral behavior, and this moral is perceived as self-relevant by listeners or readers. Winner (1988) argued that metaphor comprehension involves understanding the metaphor as an interaction between the topic and vehicle. Thus, understanding this metaphor involves deriving an appropriate and salient characteristic of the vehicle, for example, being powerful or reckless, and applying it to the topic of the sentence, the wolf.

goal-action-outcome chains of events (van den Broek, *et al*., 1997). What do we need to know in order to teach moral themes? In preliminary research using a short intervention (4 lessons in 6 weeks), in which the process of extracting a theme is described, 3rd graders did not improve in theme extraction (P. Mogush, University of Minnesota, 2000). Regardless of the length of the intervention, there may be moral developmental stages students should undergo:

1) Awareness: This may be studied by asking these questions: What was the problem? What was the worst thing(s) the character faced?
2) Moral sensitivity to the configuration of the situation: What was going on? Who was thinking about what was going on?
3) Reasoning about possible actions: What could be done? What would happen if : : : ?
4) Personal identity: What did the character think about when deciding about or doing the deed?
5) Awareness of sacrifice: How did the action affect the character and the others?
6) Action: How did the character carry out the action?
7) Positive social outcome and the implicit or explicit positive judgment of the action: How did the story end—good or bad? Why?

Such a kind of reading is an active process because:

- Readers "*get*" different information from a text based on their background (e.g., skills, knowledge, expertise)
- Readers do not necessarily "*get*" the information or message the author intends
- Themes can be constructed by the reader but not automatically or easily
- Moral messages are a special kind of theme the reader puts together that are influenced by reading skills and moral development.

Taking into account all these points, traditional character education advocates should drop their simplistic understanding about reading moral stories to build character.While they are at it, they might also reconsider their view of character itself—as a set of traits to be developed. Such a perspective does not fit with current conceptualizations of personality (Lapsley, 1996; Cervone, & Shoda, 1999), nor with new approaches to character education (e.g., Narvaez, *et al*., 2001).

Aesop's Tales and Their Analysis

> *1.On a cold and frosty day an ant that had laid up some corn in the summer time was bringing it out to dry.*
>
> *A grasshopper, half dead with hunger, begged the ant to give him a morsel to preserve his life. "What were you doing", asked the ant, "all through last summer?" "Oh", said the grasshopper, "I was not idle. I sang all day long. "The ant laughed and, collecting her grain, said, "Since you could sing all the summer, you may dance all the winter".*

What moral did Aesop draw from this story? Aesop's moral to this fable was: We should never lose a good opportunity. In other words, work while the sun shines because tomorrow it will snow. The moral clearly praises work and discourages play. Its obvious management lesson is the work ethic. The Book of Proverbs in the Jewish/Christian Bible urges us to "*Take a lesson from the ants, you lazy fellow. Learn from their ways to be wise! .. They labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter*". Aesop pits play against work. In plain language, all play and no work and you don't deserve to eat. Americans have great respect for the virtue of industriousness. This fable also illustrates the most fundamental of all laws of life, that of social exchange: pay should equal effort and effort should equal pay, and action or lack of action has

learners can easily recognize the moral dilemmas and can easily go from comprehending the fables to evaluating them. It can be claimed that through structured guidance, students can synthesise and internalize moral values. In summary, moral judgment development is a type of generalized knowledge in the form of schemas. Moral schemas provide guidance in interpreting social experience. It is reasonable to expect that these schemas affect information processing in other contexts, such as when reading moral texts.

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