

Children's literature as a means of disability awareness and ICT's role

Maria Manola, Taxiarchis Vouglanis, Fotini Maniou, Anna Maria Driga

mmanola@uniwa.gr , tvouglan@gmail.com , fvtinimaniu@yahoo.gr, anna.maria.driga@gmail.com

Abstract: People construct the image of disability through myths, anecdotes, stories and jokes that circulate in a given historical and cultural period. Cultural institutions, however, silence the ways in which such forms of discourse perpetuate social perceptions and assumptions. The deviation of individuals from the dominant normative standards is the main cause for their social marginalization and the shrinking of their human status. Literature has always been a powerful carrier of ideological messages that sometimes have the objective of consolidating and sometimes revising the dominant social structures and the categorization of vulnerable groups within them. This also applies to disability. The way it is portrayed through children's literature is an important means of raising their awareness towards it so that prejudices and stereotypes do not prevail.

Keywords: disability, children, literature, awareness.

1. HIGHLIGHTS

- Children's literature can dispel stereotypes and prejudices about disability.
- Children's literature is an important means of raising awareness of disability.
- Children's literature contributes to the social acceptance of people with disabilities.

2. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is a mirror through which children can see characteristics of heroes similar to themselves. But it is also a window that makes it easier for them to look beyond their immediate environment and get to know the world (Blaska, 2004). Parents of children with or without disabilities and educators are often looking for books that bring children with disabilities into contact. The scientific community as well as public opinion has shown interest in the subject in recent years. The limited presence of books with characters who have some kind of disability highlights the need for more stories that represent the diversity of society that includes people of different abilities (Blaska, 2004). Beckett et al tend to agree with this. (2010) as providing literature material that includes characters with some kind of disability reflects increasing social diversity, promotes positive attitudes towards students of all abilities and helps develop positive self-image in children with disabilities.

On the other hand, the omission of groups from the literature is an important issue for discussion. For Hollindale (2000) the absence or underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups and their experiences from children's literature, or the assignment of heroes who do not belong to dominant social groups to subordinate roles or anti-role roles, undoubtedly shows a disparaging attitude towards them. Let us not forget that disability is culturally produced and socially constructed (Olivier, 2009). But the issue is clearly not quantitative. The ways in which characters with disabilities are presented in literature reflect the social attitude of the time towards them and according to Karakitsios (2001)) express the social and cultural contexts of their time.

In recent years we have noticed a tendency on the part of writers to give the disabled people themselves the opportunity to express themselves through the first-person narration. But literature is a complex and complex code. Ideas and opinions are clearly expressed, others are implied. The way of linguistic expression at every level is a conscious or unconscious ideological stance, sometimes

obvious and conscious and sometimes covered or unconscious. At the same time, images and extratextual elements provide their own information and meanings which are under negotiation with the reader.

The ways in which authors of children's and young adult books manage the concept of identity is directly related to the concept of inclusion and the process of belonging to a group. Heroes not disabled or identified with their disability, heroized or victimized, superhuman or burdens to family and community, are heroes free from stereotypical types of portrayals. In addition, moving away from the dominant, still, medical model helps more fair and realistic depictions to prevail.

3. DEFINITION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Despite all the attempts to define children's literature and children's books from time to time, it becomes particularly difficult to clarify these two terms due to the decisive role of adults in them. Adults are the ones who will write stories ready for children to read, publish them, sell them, and the children will be the ones who decide whether to choose them. It is therefore an art which is not written by children for children, but cultivated by adults and addressed to children, since only adults can create the aesthetically emotional environment defined by Art (Giakos, 1993).

Despite the autonomy of the field of children's literature, its association with adult literature becomes inevitable. Rebecca Lukens states that "children's literature differs from adult literature in degree, not in ethos" (Lukens in Kanatsouli, 2007: 23-24), since children have different experiences than adults and thus are limited to less complex ideas. O'Sullivan notes that "the notable difference between children's literature and adult literature is that the former is written or adapted by adults specifically for children" (O'Sullivan, 2010: 44). However, literary texts addressed to children should not lack the existence of ideological messages. They must be treated as part of the wider section of literature so that its criticism remains the same as literature of any other kind (Oikonomidou, 2011: 45).

Loti Petrovich-Androutsopoulou prefers not to limit herself to brief definitions of children's literature as a concept, but to focus on how it differs and is recognized from other genres. It thus ends up in two aspects of its recognition, the form and the content. Regarding the first, he mentions the simplicity of the speech, the rare presence of profanity and sarcasm, the brevity but at the same time the key in the descriptions, the immediacy of the narration with a child's point of view and the clear presentation of the characters without insisting on their psychographics so as to child-hero identification is achieved. As for the second aspect, he mentions the clear context of the case, the intense and fast plot, the "purification" and the clear feeling that the reader is an object of love from the author (Petrovich-Androutsopoulou, 1990).

The above opinions could be summarized in the definition of Antonis Delonis regarding children's literature by saying that it is the space in which all those excellent literary works that address, directly or indirectly, the aesthetic demands and interests of the infant coexist and function. of childhood and adolescence and that responds to their perceptual, linguistic and emotional level (Delonis, 1990).

4. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY

Ideology concerns both the way of thinking and the attitude of people. Ideology is constituted by the values of society and culture and the perceptions and conclusions that individuals have thought, discussed and formulated about them. Ideology can be overt and visible but it can also be hidden. It should also be noted that ideology is a term that has been associated with politics but is not only related to this field. Ideology exists in people's daily lives in many different areas and concerns the way they think and is also referred to as common sense (Kanatsouli, 2004).

Ideology is variable and receives social influences as shown by the changes it undergoes in different periods and eras. People share some common ideological principles but the way they manifest them and how they process them varies from case to case. A key means of transmitting

ideology is also literature due to its simplicity and its inclusion in people's everyday life. The importance of literature also arises from another factor. The organization of society is based to a significant extent on language. This is reasonable since the medium for people to communicate with each other is language. This makes language an important code (Stephens, 1992). Language is also used in shaping and reinforcing ideology. Language can contribute to the formation of ideology through the meanings it contains and conveys. The construction of meanings is social and therefore the meanings conveyed by language as well as the narratives it creates (Oikonomidou, 2011). This is because through language, ideologies are inscribed in texts based on the social conditions of each period. Since language is the basis of literature, it is understood that it is through language that ideologies are expressed and transmitted. In particular, literature in general is a particularly important means to shape and transmit ideologies.

The same applies to children's literature, which has an even more significant effect on the formation and transmission of ideologies. Ideology is a concept that has a connection with children's literature despite the fact that such a thing does not initially seem possible. In order to understand the relationship between the two concepts, the definition of the concept of ideology should be clarified, which has many aspects. One of them focuses on the ideas it includes. More specifically, ideology is depicted as a system of ideas, which is organized in a systematic way and linked to society or its political expression. This system of ideas is also related to the way classes and groups within society act and behave. Through ideology, these behaviors and actions are legitimized and further socially entrenched through their acceptance. An important element of this definition is the timelessness of these ideas leading to the understanding of the existence of a stability which consequently leads to the dominance of these ideologies over others (Hollindale, 2000).

And Kallergis (1995) defines ideology as a system of ideas but questions the element of stability. More specifically, Kallergis (1995) argues that these ideas express the way a group thinks based on the principles that govern and characterize it, but at the same time, it is governed by a tendency to change the social reality it experiences. In essence, it treats ideology as a system that intends to change the world and is not limited to simply depicting and expressing it. The definition of ideology quoted by Kallergis (1995) has a common axis with that of Hollindale, but also a basic difference.

These ideas that constitute ideology are also expressed through texts, literature and clearly also children's literature. A question that will be examined more extensively next, is whether the expression of ideological ideas in children's literature is conscious or not. The fact is that children's literature, as was seen in the previous section, has a catalytic role in the education of children. In this context, the social and cultural values that are transmitted to him are also included. This makes children's literature an important means of transferring historical, social and cultural values to the child, mediating between the child and the ideology of his environment (Kallergis, 1995).

It should be noted that, in general, ideology is connected to art, literature and, by extension, children's literature. Moreover, it seems that in addition to the connection, important dependencies between them are also found. This is reasonable if one considers that ideology expresses society and the same applies to the art that is a derivative of it. Therefore, it can be taken for granted that art expresses the ideology of its time and the changes that exist or the developments it undergoes (Kallergis, 1995)

Based on the above, children's literature is produced and expresses the social, political and cultural values and ideas of each era, but at the same time contributes to their consolidation and reproduction through their transfer to the child. This means that between children's literature and ideology a two-way but also interdependent relationship is created. This does not mean that children's literature is the one that conveys ideological principles to children. In essence, it reinforces the ideological influences that children have already received from their environment (Hollindale, 2000).

The ideological principles and values expressed through children's literature are transferred to the child, but the way in which he will employ them also depends on the influences he has received from his environment and the experiences he has acquired. This means that the child can accept and

assimilate them completely if he has the same receptive ones, or question and judge them if the opposite is the case.

Adult literature is aimed at readers who, because of their age, have experience and critical thinking. This means that they are able to examine what is conveyed to them and possibly choose which ones they want to accept, which does not always imply the success of transmitting ideologies. But in children's literature, readers do not have this experience, and this is true of both language and society. Young children do not know the world and learn it through literature. This makes it easier to convey different ideologies about how the world is and what their attitude and behavior should be in it. Therefore, based on the ideologies that are conveyed to them through children's literature, they acquire a perspective on society and are also socialized. But this does not mean that ideologies are directly and visibly conveyed through children's literature. On the contrary, in most cases it is not visible. The ideology present in a children's literature book is presented in such a way that it does not express specific social and political positions. Doing so would discourage adults from encouraging children to read it. But when the literature is hidden inside a children's literature book, then it is easier and more feasible to read and therefore to transmit it (Kanatsouli, 2004).

In children's literature, ideology is conveyed in two ways:

1. The first of these is the author of the children's book trying to transmit the ideology through the presentation of his own views but in a way that excludes the others and if they are included, they are presented as wrong. This means that the author formulates various opinions that he may have about politics, ethics, society and other issues, as the only correct ones (Kanatsouli, 2004). In this way the transmission of the ideology is intentional on the part of the author and his goal, considering it to be correct, is to transmit it to others and especially to the children's readership. In this case, the ideology is not hidden, the author cites it and presents it in a direct way, consciously wanting to convey the specific views to the children (Prevezanou, 2007).

2. The second way is the unconscious and it concerns the passive ideology. And this comes from the author of the children's book but it is not conscious. In other words, it is not the author's intention to convey ideological messages to the children's readership through his book. Thus, there are cases where the writer aims to convey some messages and actually conveys others without even realizing it. This results from the structure or other linguistic and verbal choices he makes (Prevezanou, 2007).

Also important to mention is the collective ideology that exists in the world and from which the author can be influenced during the creation of his work. Many times an important part of a book is actually not attributed to the author himself but to the influences he receives through the world he lives in and his environment. The author's world is expressed consciously or unconsciously through his work because it is also its own carrier beyond their own self (Hollindale, 2000).

An author becomes a bearer of ideology through the narrative modes he uses in his work. Narrative modes themselves acquire the position of the carrier of ideology. Through them are conveyed, in an indirect and veiled way, the thoughts and attitudes associated with the ideology that the author wants to convey. In this context the author uses:

1. The characters of the play. The characters the author uses in the context of a story shows which characteristics he attaches importance to and which values he is loyal to thus indicating the ideology that characterizes their story. The same applies to the way the heroes move through the story as well as its development, thus expressing the author's ideology.

2. The point of view adopted by the author or illustrator. The author as well as the illustrator consciously choose the way they want to present situations, characters and events. The point of view they adopt shows the point of view and the position they express, which in turn is characterized by the ideology they want to project and transmit.

Based on the above, the great importance of images in the promotion and transmission of ideology is highlighted. The image constitutes the visual dimension of the children's literary work and its aesthetic contribution to the general artistic effect is clear. The image in children's literature has an important place since it contributes to the narration and the highlighting of the story. The point of

view therefore adopted by the illustrator has a double role. On the one hand it attracts the interest of the child-reader by creating a focal point on which to focus. On the other hand, it contributes both visually and ideologically through the aesthetic effect it creates (Giannikopoulou, 2008).

5. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND DISABILITY

Today's society is undergoing great and important changes. Globalization, but also a series of historical, social and political events, have brought about changes in the populations worldwide, including the Greek population. Thus, different cultures co-exist in the context of society and this must be done in a harmonious way and with respect. These changes are not easily accepted and require significant progress and effort. This starts from early childhood in which socialization takes place and on which social attitudes and perceptions depend in adulthood. Otherness is therefore an issue that should be part of the education and socialization of children in order for them to become familiar with it and accept it by showing the necessary respect. In this, the role of children's literature is considered important. Children's books are an important means that can bring children into contact with otherness in a way that protects them from the fear and alienation that this contact can create in other circumstances. Everyday people make distinctions based on what they know and are familiar with what they don't know and are not part of their lives. Based on these differences, they form attitudes and perceptions with which they make a distinction in society and define their identity both personally and socially. Society is organized and functions in this way and this also defines the "other", the "different" who is at the same time a stranger (Govaris, 2011).

In the past, the foreigner was defined as "other" in the sense of a different origin. Today, however, this concept now means all people who have different characteristics, including people with disabilities. Groups of different people constitute "otherness". The process of man's evolution and development includes otherness in the context that he must understand it. The treatment that is offered to people is also the one that can ensure that they move away from their "ego" and the alienation that this can create for them (Govaris, 2011).

What makes children's books about disability dangerous, according to Solis (2004), is their tendency to establish social constructs such as the concept of disability and 'normality' as authentic and therefore unquestionable. Much of children's literature either 'overtly' and intentionally or unconsciously and implicitly conveys negative images around the supposed nature of people with disability, illness or difference (Solis, 2004). In addition to the negative images and the absence or under-representation of people with disabilities as well as other minority groups in children's books, it also has a sad impact on all children. The combination of excluding sick groups and distorting their image deprives the people belonging to these groups of the possibility of an emotional connection with one of the heroes of the books with all the negative consequences this entails. Furthermore, the lack of diversity in books deprives children and young people who do not belong to these groups of the opportunity to learn about and respect the cultures and behaviors of people who are different. Thus, they develop an elitist behavior and disparage all those who do not look and act like them (Pirofski, 2001).

During the 20th century there seems to be a greater emphasis on publishing disability books that deplore unfair treatment of disabled people. Thus, children's books seem to reflect the shift from the patriarchal-protective tendencies of the 19th to the more independent and inclusive models of the 20th century. Further, however, research shows that many stereotypes are recycled in the books of the 20th century (Torrijos, 2004). A stereotypical image that often appears in children's books is that, according to which, people with disabilities are characterized not so much for their weaknesses as for the special characteristics they have, such as special achievements or exceptional talents, combined with a simultaneous sensitivity, in which special emphasis is given. Biklen & Bogdan (in Gervay, 2004) distinguished ten different models of disability: the pathetic and sad, the object of violence, the devilish, the atmospheric, the super-hero with amazing abilities, the ridiculous, the enemy of oneself, the burden on the family, the unloved, the unable to participate in everyday life. Greater awareness, however, points out Gervay (2004) has led to a revision of previous models and a more realistic

depiction of disability. New models in children's books tend to present people with disabilities as independent, equal, active members of society, and disabilities are now characterized in more precise medical terms (Manola et al., 2022). People with disabilities are no longer necessarily in the category of children who either get cured or die. Many are left with some mild form of disability or survive with a more severe form which, however, does not prevent them from leading interesting lives or from pursuing a career.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The revision of the concept of disability becomes even more vital these days due to the imminent integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classes. A multicultural literature that will equally consider the experiences of all children who are members of society will help facilitate the inclusion and acceptance of children with disabilities and strengthen their identity. Because children's literature offers many young people their unique opportunity to meet specific populations, educators can intentionally use children's books to bring children into contact with particular groups of people or particular ideas. Literature alone teaches and informs about sensitive issues for many reasons: fiction is interesting, and it is easier for young people to talk about books than about their own lives. It also provides a springboard for discussing feelings and not only teaches but influences readers' attitudes. Thus, through literature, teachers can prepare their non-disabled students for the integration of children with disabilities into the classroom.

Finally we underline the importance of the digital technologies in education domain and in disability awareness domain that is very productive and successful, facilitates and improves the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles which brings educational activities everywhere [28-37], various ICTs applications which are the core supporters of education [38-78], AI, STEM & ROBOTICS which raise educational procedures into new levers of performance [79-100], and games which transforms the education in a very friendly and enjoyable interaction [101-104]. Additionally, the enhancement and combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [105-154] as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [23-27], accelerates and improves more over the educational practices and results, especially in literate improvement and disability awareness.

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