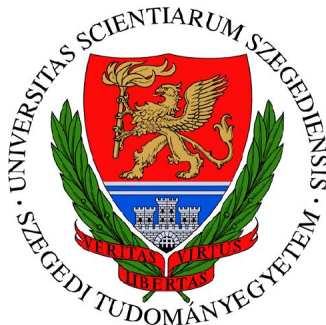University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts
Graduate School of Educational Sciences

AGNES NYITRAI

THE CRITERION ORIENTED SUPPORT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATION COMPREHENSION WITH THE HELP OF FAIRY TALES AMONG 4-8 YEARS OLD CHILDREN

Theses of a PhD Dissertation

Supervisor: Jozsef Nagy DSc

Teaching and Learning Programme

Szeged, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy is in front of an important paradigm shift due partly to scientific research – first of all in cognitive sciences -, partly to the changing social needs regarding the system of public education.

It became well known since several decades that at the time of school start there is +/- 2,5 year difference among children as to their development that does not diminish during school career, on the contrary, in some cases it is increasing (*Nagy,* 1980, 2007). Catching up of children starting school with considerable handicap has no chance in the actual system of public education. The 0,86 strong correlation between the output of students in their first school year and in their age of 14 or 18 (*Nagy*, 1980) shows that the school itself has little impact on the school career of children. (*Bourdieu,* 1978). Differences among children in the same year have become extremely great in the past few years. There are several research evidences that in case of some children spontaneous development is not assured in appropriate pace, the process needs support. The aim is not the acceleration of performance oriented development, but the support of the more successful – and more motivated – school career, of the development of personal, social and cognitive competences and as an outcome a more successful conduct of life. The relationship between school careers, the possibilities of mobility, individual prosperity and economic development has received more and more attention in Hungary too, and making schools more efficient was found to be the basic condition to diminish social disadvantages (*Fazekas, Köllő, Varga*, 2008).

It is rather dubious to expect the improvement of the current situation within the system of traditional pedagogic culture. This traditional system is using the strategy of "transferring teaching contents": in the teaching process a given curriculum that is selected on the basis of non-transparent standpoints and not adequately differentiated according to its importance is transmitted in a given time, while the knowledge level is assessed by comparing the children's output to an often ambiguously defined requirement level (*Nagy*, 2003a). Minimum performance can be sufficient to step into the next grade and considerable differences are explained with the differences in the children's capacities that are treated as evidence, therefore intentions to diminish them are incidental. Paying attention to preliminary knowledge and the socio-cultural characteristics of family backgrounds remains mostly a general declaration.

Competence based criterion oriented pedagogy based in its structure and in its functionality on the complex theory of the personality may mean a paradigm shift and the solution to make public education more efficient. The competences are the most comprehensive functional psychical component systems of the personality, motive- and ability systems (*Nagy,* 200a, 2003) and the criterion oriented support lasts till achieving an optimum level, that is, if needed it takes much more time than according to the current practice. The condition to step on the next grade is the optimum, not the minimum. This is linked with diagnostic, criterion oriented evaluation that makes possible the exact description of development and helps to define further tasks. Of course, the content that opens up the possibility of help is not secondary at all, though its selection happens on the basis of completely different considerations: children get acquainted with those elements of culture that are regarded as worth to be transferred and that can promote the most optimal way their development (*Nagy,* 2007).

Research in the past decades revealed those basic skills that have considerable impact on the success of school start (*Nagy, Józsa, Vidákovich and Fazekasné*, 2004a), measurement tools to assess the level of basic skills have been prepared and the data of national assessments have been published (*Nagy, Józsa, Vidákovich and Fazekasné*, 2004b). On this

basis methodological program-packages to support development can be worked out and tested.

The age between 4-5 years – that is the middle and upper groups of the kindergarten and the first two years of the elementary school - is the favourable period in the development of basic skills including relation comprehension. In this stage of life fairy tales are very popular, so it was evident to examine how to utilize them to support development and to work out on the basis of research experiences the methods of development support based on fairy tales. Cognitive competences representing the necessary though not sufficient conditions to the development of personal and social skills are in the core of the competency model (*Nagy, 2007*) This is why I analyse in my research first of all the role and employability of fairy tales in cognitive development, with special emphasis in the development of relation comprehension belonging to cogitative abilities. This approach can be considered original given that Hungarian as well as international literature are analysing first of all the role of fairy tales in moral development (social competence), in the achievement of spiritual harmony (personal competence) and in linguistic development (native language competence).

In my dissertation I outline as a new possibility of personal development a method of the content based support to relation comprehension that is the thematic group discussion on the basis of the known content of favourite and often heard fairy tales. For this purpose 50 fairy tales were elaborated in a way to help native linguistic, relation comprehension and deductive abilities. The publication of the new program package volume DIFER is the pragmatic relevance of my research (*Nagy, Nyitrai, Vidákovich*, 2009). According to my intentions the results presented in my dissertation lay down a basis to carry out a new control test of relation comprehension and they can contribute to further research and experiments in the field of supporting the development of abilities and skills through fairy tale telling.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The subject of my dissertation is the elaboration of a possible method of content based skill development. The theoretically my research is based on three pillars:

(1) on the interpretation of skills and specifically of relation comprehension, the description of its structure and the characterisation of its development,

(2) on the pedagogical synthesis of research related to fairy tales and to the content selected to support development,

(3) on the interpretation of development support and on the theoretical foundation of its potentialities and possible methods.

Skills as one of the central notions of pedagogy had many different interpretations in the past. Knowledge and skills were often considered as the opposite of each other, their ranking has often changed, skills were frequently considered as immutable, belief in their spontaneous development prevailed and the importance of certain skills has also changed from time to time. At present our concept of skills is determined by psychometric research (*Csapó*, 2003), by Piaget's theory (*Gallagher and Reid,* 2002; *Piaget and Inhelder*, 2002), "neo-Piagetian" theories (*Bidell and Fischer*, 1992) and research of cognitive sciences (*Csapó,* 1992, 2003; *Eysenck and Keane*, 1997; *Korom*, 2005). To have a better understanding of cognition the distinction between knowledge and operators (*Nagy,* 1985) or between propositional and procedural knowledge (*Eysenck and Keane,* 1997) represents and important step forward in the interpretation of skills, in the acceptance of the interdependence between knowledge and ability based skills.

The personality theory of component system character worked out by *József Nagy* (*Nagy, 2000a*) represents the theoretical background to relation comprehension interpreted as a skill. Relation comprehension as a cognitive competence belongs to the key competences of thinking with the function to create new knowledge from the existing through recognizing, constructing and applying the linkages between different elements. The construction of the relationships, the characteristics of their different types and the process of relation comprehension development are already well-known from research (*Nagy*, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2007).

The development of skills – contrary to general belief – is not linear and it can be characterized by an exponential curve. The development of each individual skill has a sensitive period: this has an outstanding pedagogical relevance (*Molnár Gy. and Csapó*, 2003). The development and the level of skills can be described as the process of building up the psychic component system (*Nagy*, 2007). The motivation of acquisition and schooling has an emphasized role in this development (*Józsa*, 2002, 2007) together with self-regulated learning (*Molnár É.*, 2002).

Several efforts exist nowadays to support skill development (*Csapó*, 2003; *Gordon Győri*, 1999; *Klauer*, 1997). According to *Csapó* content based skill development is efficient given the limited character of transfer (*Csapó*, 2003, 2004). In my work research connected to DIFER (*Nagy, Józsa, Vidákovich and Fazekasné*, 2004a, 2004b) and SZÖVEGFER (*Pap-szigeti, Zentai and Józsa*, 2007, *Pap-Szigeti* 2007) represents the starting point, the theoretical approach.

Fairy tales are possible means of content based development support for the group of children between 4-8 years of age. Beyond classic fairy tale research – like tale typology, fairy tales and personality development, moral development, etc. – the tale morphology of *Propp* (1999) represents a transition towards narrative psychological approaches that were worked out in frame of *Bruner*'s theory about narrative thinking (1986). The series of research about the role of narratives in socialisation based on this theory (*László*, 1999; *László and Viehoff*, 1994; *László*, 2001; *Miller*, 1994 cit. by *Nelson*, 1998) can significantly help the complex understanding of the role of fairy tales in skill development. *Nelson* (1998) writes about narrative competence and defines its six components. All of them are outcomes as well as conditions of tale telling and tale listening and their existence is considered basic for successful socialisation.

The theory of emergent literacy consolidating its importance (*Clay*, 1966, cit. by *Szinger*, 2007; *Réger*, 1990) is focusing attention to the continuous character of "growing in" to written culture and to the decisive importance of the pre-school period of life and is attributing a key role to young children's tale telling and toy-book reading experiences and to interactions between parents and children (*Bus*, 2002; *Cairney*, 2003; *Réger*, 1990; *Rodriguez and others*, 2003; *Szinger*, 2007, 2009). Due to socio-cultural situation of families there might be large differences in the literacy environment and compensating for the handicaps deriving from this, fact is a prominent task of institutional education (*Bernstein*, 1975; *Szinger*, 2007; *Torgyik* 2005).

The interpretation of the concept of development and the role of adults in is fundamental in pedagogy. Criterion oriented competence based pedagogy is the pedagogy of support (*Nagy*, 2008). Consequently the understanding of the role of educator is similar to that of the role of facilitator that represents an obvious link to personality focused approach as well (*Roger*, 1962, 1969; *Tringer*, 1991; *Sallai*, 2006; *Roger and Freiberg*, 2007) especially in relation to communication forms and possibilities.

As to activities related to fairy tales and tale telling dialogic (in Hungarian literature: interactive) telling, conversation linked to fairy tales is the relevant issue. *Morrow* and *Brittain* (2003) distinguish 3 forms of dialogic telling: (1) the co-operativ, (2) the didactic,

and (3) the performance oriented tale telling form. Hungarian pedagogy is envisioning a 4th form that encourages performance oriented interactivity following (and not interrupting) the audition of tales. Dialogic telling can fulfil expectations only when it increases and enriches experiences, corresponds to the interests of children and helps in an indirect way to establish relationship between fairy tales and everyday life experiences (*Whitehurst and others*, 1998. cit. by *Zevenbergen and Whitehurst,* 2003).

RAISING THE PROBLEM, AIMS, HYPOTHESES, MAIN ISSUES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS OF MY RESEARCH

Raising the problem

The spontaneous development of relation comprehension does not help all the children to reach the optimum level. Relation comprehension is a critical basic skill, that is; in the lack of its adequate development other skills based on it cannot develop properly. This is why purposeful support of its development is needed, that - according to our concept concerning skill development – can happen in a content based way. In the sensitive period of relation comprehension in the age of 4-8 years fairy tales represent friendly contents that due partly to their immanent possibilities, partly to their role in children's life can influence in a large extent the development of their cognitive, personal and social competences making them particularly suitable to become the instruments of content based criterion oriented development support.

Aims

The elaboration of one of the basic parts of the DIFER program package utilizing new possibilities of the criterion oriented and competence based pedagogy opens up ways to apply fairy tales among children in kindergarten and early school age to help relation comprehension. At the same time it assists educators in the interpretation and expression of their role and in their methodological culture.

Hypotheses

(1) Fairy tales, given their immanent possibilities (specificities of genre, content) and the mechanism as literary experience exerts its impact are appropriate to support relation comprehension.
(2) Relationships appearing in fairy tales and representing the basis of our method suit well the experiences and the vision of life of children in kindergarten or early school age so they can particularly useful for development.
(3) On the basis of pedagogical and psychological literature considerable differences can be expected among the tale telling habits of families as a consequence of their socio-cultural background.
(4) In traditional pedagogical culture the methodological approaches related to working with fairy tales do not permit to exploit tales for the purpose of relation comprehension.
(5) With the use of the methodological culture substantiated by criterion oriented competence based pedagogy tale telling and thematic group conversation may become the means of continuous criterion oriented development in kindergartens and in the

first two years of elementary schools and can influence in a favourable way the development of relation comprehension.

(6) Tale telling and conversation about experiences can be well applied also for the continuous criterion oriented development support in small group or individual playful educative sessions with children coming from families with social and cultural disadvantages.

My empirical research to verify the hypothesises

(1) Preliminary one year long experiment in two kindergartens in Budapest with a total sample N=127
(2) The analysis of relationships appearing in N=100 tales
(3) The survey by a questionnaire of tale telling habits of N=141 families having children in kindergarten and early school age
(4) The overall analysis (N=17) of three school-book packages that are the most often employed for reading in the 1st and 2nd years of elementary schools with respect to fairy tales and tasks related to them
(5) A development generating methodological experiment with a control group in the kindergartens and schools in the locality of Szeghalom between 2007-2009 with a sample of N=287 in frame of the experiment funded by the OTKA K 68798 tender

Research methods and instruments

The research methodology was selected from among the pedagogical research methods to fit the aims and the character of the different research components described above.
The following research instruments were applied:
The development of children was assessed by the DIFER test system (*Nagy, Józsa, Vidákovich and Fazekasné*, 2004b).
Fairy tales were prepared for thematic group conversation following the technical proposals and under the guidance of *József Nagy*, the analysis of relationships together with the elaboration of the group of questions to support the development of relation comprehension and of relational vocabulary were reviewed by *József Nagy*, while the component to support the development of experimental deduction was reviewed by *Tibor Vidákovich*. The "pattern" to prepare tales for thematic group conversations has evolved as a result of a long process and has been modified in the light of experiences during tests and due to theoretic-professional analysis.
In the analysis of relationships appearing in fairy tales the category system worked out for different types of relationships by *Nagy* (2000b) were utilized and I also added some considerations elaborated on my own.
I examined tale-telling family habits with the use of a questionnaire that I worked out for this purpose utilizing my earlier research experiences, the system of spare-time activities of *Timea Tibori* (1997) and a group of question from PREFER (*Nagy*, 1986).
For the analysis of school-books I laid down a series of criteria specific for this research.

Data bases were analyzed by SPSS.

My empirical research can be divided in two parts. The first group represents a contribution to the methodology of criterion based development support, like (1) the problem raising experiment, (2) the analysis of relationships appearing in fairy tales, (3) the survey among

parents and (4) the analysis of school-books. The second group contains the test of the method and the development generating experiment with control group.

RESULTS

I. THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH TO HELP THE ELABORATION OF THE METHOD OF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT (verification of hypotheses 1-2-3-4)

(1) *Preliminary one year long experiment in two kindergartens in Budapest*

The aim of our experiment was to examine whether tale-telling and group conversations about relationships appearing in the content of tales can be applied in the support of the development of relation comprehension.

The results of the 1st and 2nd assessments of children in kindergartens involved in the experiment were compared by a t-test. The result of the test showed a significant difference (t= -8,748, p<0,001, average improvement 13,6 %). The correlation of relation comprehension between the two assessments in the experimental sample group r=0,69 p<0,01, the results of children in the case of the 2nd assessment were not exclusively determined by the 1st assessment. The evidence shows that the difference is not accidental, but it is due to development support.

(2) The analysis of relationships appearing in fairy tales

My work containing the analysis of a hundred of tales was focused to answer the following questions:
(1) What is the prevalence of relationships in the contents that significantly influence how tales run from the point of
   (a) causality and joint occurrence
   (b) probability and necessity
   (c) reality and fiction?
   All the eight organizing relationships are present in fairy tales with the dominance (70 %) of causal relationships. The rate of probability relationships is 46 % that is extremely important from the point of promoting the development of probability thinking. The rate of realistic relationships is 68 % while fictitious relationships occur in 32 %. (Given the characteristics of the genre there are no hypothetic relationships in fairy tales.)
(2) How relationships can be grouped from the point of contents?
   For the content related grouping of relationships I worked out the following category system that I presumed to fit well the way of thinking of the age group between 4-8 years: (a) phenomenon of nature, (b) attribute, (c) problem handling, (d) life situation, behaviour, (e) relations, interactions and (f) other.
(3) Can we lay down some sort of category specificity?
   Relationships linked to the phenomena of nature are mostly causal (81,2 %), relationships concerning attributes are balanced: prevalence of causality is 52,9 % while of joint occurrence is 47 %. In the case of the other categories the rate of causality is at least 2/3 compared to joint occurrence. In problem solving and in interactions the rate of probability relationships is higher than the rate of necessity. The rate of prevalence of necessity relationships is high (62 %) in the case of natural phenomena and in the case of life situations (61 %).

(4) What linkages exist or can exist between the relationship formulated in the contents and the everyday life experiences of children?

The contents concerning the relationships reinforce the earlier experiences of children listening to fairy tale telling and add new ones to them. The modulation through the joy of recognizing them and through the uniqueness of the given situation helps the development of the structure of experience and knowledge of small children.

(3) The analysis of family tale telling habits

The aim of this research component was to describe the family tale telling habits and the characteristics of the ways of life and interactions according to the following questions:

(1) How the level of education of parents influences tale telling habits (frequency, popularity)?

In the case of mothers with children of kindergarten age the correlation of frequency of tale telling with education is $r=0,41$ $p<0,01$, and between education and the fondness of tale telling is $r=0,54$ $p<0,01$, while in case of fathers: $r=0,37$ $p<0,01$ and $r=0,27$ $p<0,05$. In the case of mothers of school children the frequency is correlated with education level as $r=0,52$ $p<0,01$, while correlation of education with the fondness of tale telling is $r=0,38$ $p<0,01$. As to fathers the respective indicators are: $r=0,43$ $p<0,01$ and $r=0,26$ $p<0,05$. More educated parents tell fairy tales to their children more frequently and they are more fond of it as well.

(2) What are the differences between mothers and fathers regarding their relationship to and participation in tale telling?

Mothers like to tell tales more than fathers (83 % of mothers and 53 % of fathers like very much to do it) and there are significant relationships between the data of mothers and fathers of kindergarten age children concerning the fondness of tale telling: $r=0,48$, $p<0,01$ while in the case of school children $r=0,45$, $p<0,01$. Children in this respect enjoy double benefit or double handicap.

(3) Is there a relationship between the frequency of tale telling and of other situations of interactions between parents and children?

The correlation between conversations about work and plans and between tale telling in the case of kindergarten children is $r=0,34$, $p<0,01$ while in the case of school children it is weaker: $r=0,029$, $p<0,05$. The relationship between the frequency of conversations during joint activities and tale telling is significant only in the case of kindergarten children: $r=0,26$ $p<0,05$. No significant relation was found between other interaction situations and tale telling neither in the case of kindergarten nor of school children.

(4) How the habits of watching television influence the frequency of tale telling?

There is a weak to medium level negative correlation between the frequency of watching television and telling tales in both groups: in the case of kindergarten children $r= -0,18$, non-significant in the case of school children $r= -0,29$ $p<0,05$.

(5) Is there a relationship between spare-time activities of the families and tale telling?

In families raising kindergarten age children I found a medium level $p<0,05$ correlation between playing and reading at home, participating in cultural

programmes and between the frequency of tale telling. In the case of school children visiting relatives, reading at home and cultural programmes have a similar correlation with tale telling. Other spare-time activities are less correlated with the frequency of tale telling.

(4) The analysis of school books

The aim of this research was to reveal how fairy tales are present in the teaching curricula for the 1st and 2nd years of elementary schools and what tasks are linked to the elaboration of tales. On the basis of my analysis I found answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the characteristics of tales in school books (rate and types of tales, the level of their notoriety and correspondence to the interests of children in the 1st and 2nd class)?
Tales represent 10-20 % of all the selected texts in four of the six examined school books, while their share is higher in the two others. The offer of tales is mean, in the six school books there were 130-150 fairy tales altogether and selection is probably habitual. 15-20 % of tales might be known to children from their kindergarten experience but there are no references to this.

(2) How reading books help comprehension?
Comprehension raises several problems. The considerations regarding the selection of tales and the method of comprehension are not clear. On a professional and ethical basis revisions are contestable, the efficiency of the use of proverbs and others is dubious, the explanations of expressions raise professional questions as to the selection of words explained and as to the formulation of the explanations. Additional information that might be a good method is rarely adopted.

(3) What characterizes the tasks linked to fairy tales (quantity of tasks, their targets, content and their solution methods)?
Six to eight tasks are linked to each fairy tale. A smaller part (25 % in average) aims at exercising reading, a larger part targets the understanding of the text and less than 25 % contains the elaboration of experiences. Solutions are based on verbalism while different forms of self expression, like drawing or dramatization have a minor role altogether with a less than 10 % share.

(4) What is the share of tasks that develop thinking abilities? Are these appropriate to support development in quantitative as well as in qualitative aspects?
From quantitative (with a share between 13-26 %) as well as qualitative aspects the tasks that are designed to help the development of thinking abilities can be strongly disapproved. It is accidental which tasks are solved (as is the control of the solutions too), so probably they have no considerable impact on the development of thinking abilities.

II. RESULTS OF THE METHODOLOGY TESTING (MAIN RESEARCH) EXPERIMENT (verification of hypotheses 5-6)

Our method was tested in our development generating methodological experiment with a control group in kindergartens and schools of the locality of Szeghalom in frame of the OTKA K 68798 project. In this locality the share of children living in disadvantageuos situation is 41 % and roma children have a considerable presence. The experiment aiming at the development of relation comprehension started during the autumn of 2007 when the children in the sample were in the last year of kindergarten. There were 172 children in the

experimental group and 115 in the control group. At the start of the experiment an assessment was made with the relation recognition test of the DIFER test system. The data of this preliminary measurement represent the starting point of our developmental work. Educators were prepared through trainings and tematic group discussions to apply the development methods through fairy tales and their work was continuously followed and help was offered when needed. To evaluate the efficiency of the development follow up measurements were carried out. The first follow up assessment was realized during the autumn of 2008, the second one during the of 2009.

The starting level of the experimental and the control groups of children in the last grade of kindergarten involved in our research was almost the same ($\overline{x}_{kis}$ = 72%p; $\overline{x}_{kont}$ = 75%p; t = -1,565, p = 0,119). Till the first school year the level of the experimental group has risen to 85 % point, while the level of the control group to 84 % points. No significant difference can be demonstrated between the experimental and the control group (t=0,585, p=0,559). For the second class the development level of the experimental group has arrived to 92 % points, at the same time that of the control group was 80 % points. The development of the experimental group was unbroken during the two years, while the development of the control group has stalled in the second school year. At this age difference between the two groups is significant (t= 6,006, p=0,000). The impact of the experiment during the two years: σ = 0,84 can be already demonstrated. In both samples a 65 % points mode can be observed, the development level is 85 % points in the 1st school year and 95 % points in the 2nd among the 75 % of the experimental pupils, while in the control group the respective indicator is only 50 %. In the last kindergarten grade 22 % of the experimental group was at the optimal level in relation comprehension, while 26 % of the control group was at this level. In the 1st school year 42 % of the experimental group and 38 % of the control group were at the optimal level. Later for the 2nd year 80 % of the experimental group and 56 % of the control group have arrived to the optimal level of attainment.

The tasks of the relation comprehension test belong to the dimensions of causality and joint occurrence. According to our experiences the recognition of causal relationships seems to be easier for children than the recognition of joint occurrences. In our experiment we compared the change in the recognition of causal relationships and of joint occurrences. The recognition of causal relationships has changed as follows: the starting level in the last kindergarten grade group was 66 % points that increased to 79 % points in the 1st school year and to 87 % points in the 2nd. In the first experimental year of the control group the development ranged from 68 % points to 77 % points, then in the second year relation comprehension stagnated. As to the recognition of relationships of joint occurrences a continuous, almost linear development can be found from the starting 78 % points to 96 % points in the experimental group. The development of the control group was the same in the first year, and it was fallen back by 7 % points at the end of the 2nd school year. There is development in the first school year only in the experimental group that indicates the necessity to deal in a targeted way with the relationship of joint occurrences as no spontaneous development can be witnessed.

In the study of development the correlation indicators of the test results registered at different periods proved to be feasible to characterize the temporal stability of development. The level of development of relation comprehension measured at two different times in the experimental group showed a 0,259 correlation in the first year when and it was 0,443 in the control group. The ranking of children belonging to the control group has changed less during the first year than the ranking of those belonging to the experimental group. With the exception of the period between the last kindergarten grade and the 2nd school year correlations are lower in both groups than those calculated for the starting year. The coefficient is less significant in the experimental group which means that the ranking between

children has completely changed. Correlation was higher and more significant in the control group.

The relationships in relation comprehension were examined by the following background variables: education level of father and mother, social disadvantages, material disadvantages, emotional disadvantages and whether parents consider children's learning as a value. In the last kindergarten grade a higher correlation coefficients were found in the experimental group than in the control group. For the 2nd school year these coefficients decreased without exception in the experimental group which demonstrates that the ranking according to social background and to different disadvantages prevail even less than at the start in the development of relation comprehension.

The explanatory influence on the variance of relation comprehension was examined by regression analysis. In the last grade of the kindergarten the above variables explain till 10 % the differences in the experimental group and till 4 % in the control group. In both groups emotional disadvantage has the strongest explanatory impact. The influence of these background variables during the first year diminishes to 9 % in the experimental group while it increases to 17 % in the control group. In both groups the variable concerning the father's level of education makes to feel its impact the most. All explanatory impacts diminish to + % in the experimental group and to 12 % in the control group. In the experimental group the level of education of parents while in the control group social disadvantages have the strongest explanatory influences. To sum up, the explanatory impacts coming from the starting background factors were successfully diminished during the experiment, while the opposite happened in the control group.

Our methodology testing experiment evidenced both, the necessity and the efficient possible employability of development support. The criteria oriented development support in the case of children in disadvantageous situations can have an outstanding importance given that their development in traditional pedagogic culture slows down and arrives to a standstill.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF STEPS FORWARD

The pedagogical utilization of the results

The method worked out to support relation comprehension is considered to be new in the practice of public education; certain of its elements are present in the curriculum of the accredited DIFER training and the volume introducing the DIFER program package has been also published (*Nagy, Nyitrai and Vidákovich*, 2009).

The diffusion of the method (in further education, at conferences, during consultations, in written publications) among the largest possible professional circles is necessary together with the continuous collection, analysis and utilisation of experiences concerning the use of the method. Working out other accredited further education programs of educators that demonstrate the development support of other skill and abilities can be also examined thoroughly. Several results of our research raise the necessity to re-examine certain issues of learning and teaching methods as well as the selection of curricula. There is much more potential of development support in fairy tales than actually utilized in pedagogical practice. The children of parents with low educational level and/or with different disadvantages are in handicap regarding both, the possibilities of experiencing tale telling and enriching their experiences during working day time spent with their parents respect to the children of middle class parents. The compensation of these disadvantages according to the possibilities belongs to the priority tasks of institutional education.

Further research tasks

My research aimed at working out and testing a given method to support the development of a given skill, that is, of relation comprehension. The results of my research and their conclusions indicate further steps in different directions. The three main directions are the following:

(1) *Further steps along age*: The support of skill development is a long process, and though my research focused on the possibilities of development support in the sensitive period, the study of the precedents and the continuation of this sensitive stage would be also important. We know still little about the development of small children. It can be presumed that the adult environment strengthening and supporting the self-reliance and activity of children together with offering emotional security to them has a positive influence on development. In the past few years the results of cognitive sciences called attention to the outstanding importance of the development in the first years of life. Working out a pedagogical culture based on this evidence is an important task of the coming years. Similarly to this, working out feasible methods to help the development of children in the 3rd and 4th years of elementary schools has a great importance as this is actually a missing link in the chain of schooling given that our method has been elaborated for those in the age of 4-8 years while SZÖVEGFER has been prepared for those in the $5\text{-}6^{th}$ classes. As interest towards fairy tales considerably decreases in the age of 8-9 years, a key task is to find content with similar importance to tales and to analyse it from the viewpoint of the subject. The elaboration of a method suitable for the development support of children in the 3rd and 4th classes contains the elaboration of an appropriate instrument (system) for the criteria oriented monitoring of development as well.

(2) *The search and elaboration of other contents and methods suitable to support development apart from fairy tales*: Thematic group conversations related to fairy tales are only one of the possible methods to support development. On the basis of the research results and of the experiences of inquiries the elaboration of tasks that can support the development of relation comprehension, that are interesting and can be well applied in co-operative learning looks necessary. In the case of children in the 1st and 2nd year the contents of mathematics, of environment and of grammar should be also studied with respect to the development support of relation comprehension.

(3) *The utilization of fairy tales proved to be efficient in content based skill development for the support of developing other competences:* The analysis and evaluation of the influence on the vocabulary of relations (*Nagy*, 2009) and on experimental deduction (*Vidákovich*, 2009) would be important. The employability of fairy tales from the point of developing sociability and working out the method to support development could be desirable.

Besides them it would be useful to carry out a representative research to study the pedagogical relevance of the method presented in the dissertation.

All the above directions represent complex research-development tasks that aim at the shaping of pedagogical-methodological culture and at influencing the general professional attitudes. Trainings, further education have prominent importance together with the demonstration that educators need to think in a different way, acquiring some practical techniques are not sufficient.

Acknowledgements

LITTERATURE

Bernstein, B. (1975): Nyelvi szocializáció és oktathatóság. . In: Melegh Csilla (2003, szerk.:) *Iskola és társadalom.* Szöveggyűjtemény. Dialóg Campus Kiadó, Budapest - Pécs. 173–196.

Bidell, T.R. and Fischer, K.W. (1994): Cognitive development in educational contexts: implications of skill theory. In: Demetriou, A. Shayer, M. és Efklides, A. (Szerk.): *Noe-Piagetian Theories of Cognitive Development. Impications and applications for education*. Routledge. 9–30.

Bourdieu, P. (1978): *A társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek újratermelése*. Gondolat, Budapest.

Bruner, J. (1986): Two Modes of Thougt. In: *Actual Mind, Possible Worlds.* Harvard University Press.

Bus, A.G. (2002): Joint caregiver-child strorybook reading: A route to literacy dvelopment. In: Neuman, S.B. és Dickinson, D.K. (szerk.): *Handbook of early literacy research.* The Guilford Press, New York. 179–191.

Cairney, T. H. (2003): Literacy within family life. In: Hall, N., Larson, J. és Marsh, J. (szerk.): *Handbook of early childhood literacy.* SAGE, London. 85–98.

Csapó Benő (1992): *Kognitív pedagógia.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Csapó Benő (2003): *A képességek fejlődése és iskolai fejlesztése.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Csapó Benő (2004): Képességfejlesztés az iskolában – problémák és lehetőségek. In: Csapó (szerk.): *A tudás és az iskola.* Műszaki Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 89-101.

Eysenck, M. W. és Keane, M. T. (1997): *Kognitív pszichológia.* Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.

Fazekas Károly, Köllő János és Varga Júlia (2008, szerk.): *Zöld könyv a magyar közoktatás megújulásáért.* ECOSTAT. Budapest.

Gallagher, J. M. és Reid, D. K. (2002): *The learning theory of Piaget and Inhelder.* Universe., s. 1. USA.

Gordon Győri János (1999): A közvetlen gondolkodási készség-fejlesztés pedagógiája az elmúlt évtizedek nemzetközi pedagógiájában. *Iskolakultúra*, 9. 16–35.

Józsa Krisztián (2002): Az elsajátítási motiváció pedagógiai jelentősége. *Magyar Pedagógia,* 102. 1. sz. 79–104.

Józsa Krisztián (2007): *Az elsajátítási motiváció.* Műszaki Kiadó, Budapest.

Klauer, K. J. (1997): A tanulás és a kognitív képességek fejlesztése. Az induktív gondolkodást fejlesztő tréning. *Iskolakultúra* 12. sz. 85–92.

Korom Erzsébet (2005): *Fogalmi fejlődés és fogalmi váltás*. Műszaki Könyvkiadó, Budapest.

László János (1999): *Társas tudás, elbeszélés, identitás.* Scientia Humana/ Kairosz, Budapest.

László János: Narratív pszichológia: új megközelítés a pszichológiában. In: László János és Thomka Beáta (2001, szerk.): *Narratívák 5. Narratív pszichológia.* Kijárat Kiadó, 7–15.

László János és Viehoff, Reinhold: Az irodalmi műfajok mint kognitív sémák. *Pszichológia*, 1994, 3. sz. 325–342.

Molnár Éva (2002): Önszabályozó tanulás: nemzetközi kutatási irányzatok és tendenciák. *Magyar Pedagógia*, 102. 1. sz. 63–79.

Molnár Gyöngyvér és Csapó Benő: A képességek fejlődésének logisztikus modellje. *Iskolakultúra*, 2003. 2. sz. 57–69.

Morrow, L. M. Brittain, R. (2003): Storybook reading in the elementary school: Current practices. In: van Kleeck, A., Stahl, S. A. és Bauer, E. B. (szerk.).: *On reading books to children. Parents and Teachers*. CIERA, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Mahwah, New Yersey. 140–159.

Nagy József (1980): *5-6 éves gyermekeink iskolakészültsége*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Nagy József (1985): *A tudástechnológia elméleti alapjai*. OOK, Veszprém.

Nagy József (1986): *PREFER. Preventív Fejlődésvizsgáló Rendszer 4-7 éves gyermekek számára*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Nagy József (2000a): *XXI. század és nevelés*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.

Nagy József (2000b): Összefüggés-megértés. *Magyar Pedagógia* 2. sz. 141–185.

Nagy József (2003)*: Knowledge-based society and education: The problem of time*. *Early Childhood Research*, 1. 7–19.

Nagy József (2004): Tapasztalati összefüggés-megértés. In: Nagy József, Józsa Krisztián, Vidákovich Tibor, Fazekasné Fenyvesi Margit: *Az elemi alapkészségek fejlődése 4-8 éves korban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged. 63–72.

Nagy József (2007): *Kompetencia alapú kritériumorientált pedagógia*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged.

Nagy József (2008): Kritériumorientált fejlődéssegítés. In: Korom Erzsébet (szerk.): *Kompetencia alapú oktatás és hatékonyság*; összeállítás a Koch Sándor Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat XLIV. Pedagógiai Nyári Egyetemén elhangzott előadásokból. Koch Sándor Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat, Szeged. 5–25.

Nagy József, Józsa Krisztián, Vidákovich Tibor és Fazekasné Fenyvesi Margit (2004a)*: Az elemi alapkészségek fejlődése 4-8 éves korban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged.

Nagy József, Józsa Krisztián, Vidákovich Tibor és Fazekasné Fenyvesi Margit (2004b): *DIFER Programcsomag: Diagnosztikus fejlődésvizsgáló kritériumorientált fejlesztő rendszer 4-8 évesek számára*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged.

Nagy József, Nyitrai Ágnes és Vidákovich Tibor (2009): *Fejlesztés mesékkel. Az anyanyelv, a gondolkodás fejlődésének segítése mesékkel 4-8 éves korban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged.

Nelson, K. (1998): *Language in cognitive development. The emergence of the mediated mind*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Pap-Szigeti Róbert (2007): Kritériumorientált fejlesztés SZÖVEGFER programcsomaggal: eredmények. In: Nagy József (2007): *Kompetenciaalapú kritériumorientált pedagógia*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged, 334–347.

Pap-Szigeti Róbert, Zentai Gabriella és Józsa Krisztián: (2007): Kritériumorientált fejlesztés SZÖVEGFER programcsomaggal: módszerek. In: Nagy József (2007): *Kompetenciaalapú kritériumorientált pedagógia*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged. 312–334

Piaget, J. (1997): *Az értelem pszichológiája*. Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest.

Piaget, J. és Inhelder, B. (2002): *Gyermeklélektan*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.

Propp, V. J. (1999): *A mese morfológiája*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.

Réger Zita (1990): *Utak a nyelvhez*. Nyelvi szocializáció, nyelvi hátrány. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Rodriguez, E. T. at all (2009): The formative role of home literacy experiences across The first three years of life in children from low-income families. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30. 677–694.

Rogers, C. R. (1962): The interpersonal relationship: The core of guidence. *Harvard Educational Review*, 42, 416–429.

Rogers, C. R. (1969): *Freedom to learn. A view what education might become*. Columbus.

Rogers, C. R. és Freiberg, H. J.: (2007): *A tanulás szabadsága*. EDGE 2000 Kiadó – Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet, Budapest.

Sallai Éva (2006): Szakmai divatok és az iskola belső világa. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 7-8. sz. 116–124.

Szinger Veronika (2007): Kivárás és bontakozó írásbeliség – Hagyomány és újszerűség az óvo-dai írás- és olvasás előkészítésben. *Könyv és Nevelés*, 1. sz. 70–85.

Szinger Veronika (2009): Nagycsoportos óvodások írásbeliséggel kapcsolatos tudása és tevékenységei. *Könyv és Nevelés*, 2. Elektronikus forrás: www.tanszertar.hu/eken/2009_02/szv_09.02.htm. Megtekintés dátuma: 2009. december 3.

Tibori Tímea (1997): A szabadidő szerkezetváltozása, 1977-1997. In: Hanák Katalin és Neményi Mária (1998, szerk.): *Szociológia – emberközelben. Losonczi Ágnes köszöntése*. Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 277–307.

Torgyik Judit (2005): Nyelvi szocializáció és oktatás. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle,* 3. sz. 3–10.

Tringer László (1991): *A gyógyító beszélgetés*. Magyar Viselkedéstudományi és Kognitív Terápiás Egyesület, Budapest.

Zevenbergen, A. A. és Whitehurst, G. J.: Dialogic reading: A shared picture book reading intervention for preschoolers.In: van Kleeck, A., Stahl, S. A. és Bauer, E. B. (szerk).: *On reading books to children. Parents and Teachers*. CIERA, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Mahwah, New Yersey.177–202.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE SUBJECT OF THE DISERTATION

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2010): A szociális kompetencia óvodai fejlődésének segítése mesékkel. In: Zsolnai Anikó és Kasik László (szerk.): *A szociális kompetencia fejlesztésének elméleti és gyakorlati alapjai*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest. (közlésre elfogadva, megjelenés alatt).

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2010): Mesékből sarjadó kompetenciáink. *Kapocs*. 45. sz. 12–21.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2010): A mesék szerepe a szociális kompetencia fejlődésében. Szimpóziumelőadás. VIII. Pedagógiai Értékelési Konferencia, Szeged, 2010. április 16-17. *Tartalmi összefoglalók*, 80.

- Nyitrai Ágnes és Zentai Gabriella (2010): A mesékkel történő fejlődéssegítés hatásának vizsgálata. Szimpóziumelőadás. VIII. Pedagógiai Értékelési Konferencia, Szeged, 2010. április16-17. *Tartalmi összefoglalók*, 141.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): A mese és a mesélés fejlesztő hatása. In: Nagy József (szerk.): *Fejlesztés mesékkel. Az anyanyelv, a gondolkodás fejlődésének segítése 4-8 éves életkorban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged. 9–31.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): Az összefüggés-kezelés fejlődésének segítése. In: Nagy József (szerk.): *Fejlesztés mesékkel. Az anyanyelv, a gondolkodás fejlődésének segítése 4-8 éves életkorban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged. 53–80.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): A csoportos beszélgetésre előkészített mesék. In: Nagy József (szerk): *Fejlesztés mesékkel. Az anyanyelv, a gondolkodás fejlődésének segítése 4-8 éves életkorban*. Mozaik Kiadó, Szeged. 105–210.

- Agnes Szombathelyi-Nyitrai (2009): The role of fairy tales and story-telling in the development of social and cognitives competences of children. *Journal of the Comenius Association,* No. 18. September 2009. 33–36.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): Mesék és fejlődéssegítő feladatok az 1. és 2. osztályos olvasókönyvekben. *Iskolakultúra,* 11. 3–19.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): Az összefüggés-kezelés fejlődésének segítése mesékkel és a mesékről való csoportos beszélgetésekkel. Szimpóziumelőadás. VII. Pedagógiai Értékelési Konferencia, Szeged, 2009. április 24-25. *Tartalmi összefoglalók*, 39.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): A mesék szerepe a gondolkodás és az anyanyelv fejlesztésében. Készségfejlesztés gyermekkorban: a DIFER Programcsomag. Békéscsaba, 2009. november 16-17.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2009): A mesében rejlő lehetőségek a gondolkodás és az anyanyelv fejlesztésére. Előadás a Mozaik Módszertani napon. Szeged, 2009. november 24.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2008): A mese jelenléte a családok életében. Előadás. VI. Pedagógiai Értékelési Konferencia, Szeged, 2008. április 11-12. *Tartalmi összefoglalók,* 69.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2007): A népmese az általános iskolák alsó tagozatának tananyagában. Előadás a Benedek Elek Konferencián, AVKF. 2007. ápr. 23. *Könyv és Nevelés,* 2. sz. 52–56.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2007): Az olvasási képesség fejlődése és fejlesztése – gondolatok az olvasásról és az olvasástanításról egy tanulmánykötet kapcsán. (Recenzió *Az olvasási képesség fejlődése és fejlesztése.* Szerk.: Józsa Krisztián (2006) Dinasztia Tankönyvkiadó, Bp.). *Könyv és Nevelés,* 4. sz. 70–75.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2007): Mit tanul(hat)nak gyermekeink a mesékből? Poszter. V. Pedagógiai Értékelési Konferencia, Szeged, 2007. április 12-14. *Tartalmi összefoglalók,* 96.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2007): A mese a családok életében. Előadás. Művészetek szerepe a nevelésben. Nemzetközi művészeti nevelési konferencia, Apor Vilmos Katolikus Főiskola, Vác, 2007. november 22-23. In: Sallai Éva (szerk.): *Művészetek szerepe a személyiségfejlesztésben.* AVKF, Vác. 139–148.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2006): A mesék lehetséges szerepe, alkalmazása az összefüggés-kezelés fejlődésének segítésében 4-8 éves gyermekek körében. Poszter a VI. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencián. Bp. 2006. okt. 26-28. Tartalmi összefoglalók, 143.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2005): A mondóka, a vers, a mese és a képeskönyv szerepe a gyermekek életében, fejlődésében. In: Pósfai Ferencné és Sebestyén Bianka (szerk.): Ciróka, maróka. Mondóka, vers, mese szöveggyűjtemény. Szombathely. 6–20.

- Szombathelyiné Nyitrai Ágnes (2005): Művészi élmények az élet első éveiben. Glitterbird Nemzetközi Szimpózium, 2005. október, Budapest. Megjelent a Szimpózium kötetében magyarul és angolul.

- Agnes Nyitrai (1998): The role of picture-books and story-telling in children's development in day care centers. Poster at the Xvth Biennial Meetings of ISSBD. Berne, Switzerland, July 1st to 4.1998.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (1998): A bölcsődés gyermekek tevékenysége, viselkedése a mesélés, verselés, képeskönyv-nézegetés helyzeteiben. Poszter a Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XIII. Tudományos Nagygyűlésén. Pécs, 1998. április 15-18. Kézirat

- Agnes Nyitrai, Marta Korintus, Katalin Mátay (1996): A few characteristics of caregiver-child interaction. Poster at the XIVth Biennial Meeting of ISSBD. August 12-16. Québec City, Canada, Abstract. 250. p.

- Marta, Korintus, Agnes, Nyitrai,_Katalin Mátay (1996): Monitoring quality: Using self-assessment materials to raise standards in Hungarian day care centers for young children. Poster at The XIVth Biennial Meeting of ISSBD. august 12-16. 1996 Québec City, Canada. Abstact, 331. p.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (1996): A mese, a vers és a képeskönyv-nézegetés szerepe a bölcsődés gyermekek életében. Előadás a Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XII. Országos Tudományos Nagygyűlésén. 1996. május 24. megjelent: *BOMINFO*, Budapest. 1996. NO. 2.

- M. Korintus, A. Nyitrai, K. Mátay (1995): The two functions of quality assessment: Raising standards and providing guidance. Presentation of the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, March 30 April 2, 1995

- M. Korintus, Á. Nyitrai, K. Mátay, K. Papp (1994): Adapting the quality assessment measures for day care in Hungary. Poster at the XIIIth Biennial Meetings of ISSBD, 28 June-2 July, 1994. in: Koops, Hopkins, Engelen: Abstracts XIIIth Biennial Meetings of ISSBD, 28 June - 2 July, 1994 Amsterdam, The Netherlands

- Nyitrai Ágnes, Korintus Mihályné, dr. Mátay Katalin és Papp Krisztina (1994): A gondozónő és a gyermekek közötti interakció néhány sajátossága. Előadás a Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XI. Tudományos Nagygyűlésén. Debrecen, 1994. április 6-9. Kézirat.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (1992): A mesélés során felmerülő kommunikációs problémák hatása a bölcsődéseknél. Előadás az I. Kisgyermeknevelési Konferencián, Pécs, 1992. augusztus 26-28. Kézirat.

- Nyitrai Ágnes (1988): Definíciók az alsó tagozatos anyanyelvi oktatásban. A 3. osztályos Olvasókönyv szómagyarázatainak elemzése. Egyetemi szakdolgozat. JATE, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Szeged

- Nyitrai Ágnes (1995): A mese, a vers és a képeskönyv szerepe a bölcsődés gyermekek életében és fejlődésében. Bölcsészdoktori értekezés, JATE, Szeged,