Teacher Candidates as the Writers of the 21st Century Tales

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Abstract

It is well known that using tales in teaching has a long history since they offer numerous advantages to both teachers and learners [1]. Particularly for language teachers, they are valuable materials to facilitate teaching and learning process [2], [3]. They are usually short texts with their simple plots and a few characters, and hence are suitable to focus on in one or two teaching sessions. Their themes are mostly universal and easy to comprehend. In addition, they are easily accessible and language teachers prefer using them in their classroom practices. For learners, they are appealing because they trigger their curiosity and imagination. Tales are accompanied with storytelling techniques most of the time and create a more sharing and cooperative atmosphere within classroom. Bearing the advantages of tales in mind, it might be useful for teachers and teacher educators to pay a special attention to use tales as language teaching materials. The purpose of this study is to offer a model to be used in ITE (Initial Teacher Education) and to encourage teacher candidates to write their own tales by rethinking the setting, characters and messages, which are in line with the changing life styles in the 21st century. Instead of using the widely known tales, the new ones written by teacher candidates can lead to new classroom implementations.

Key Words: Tales, Initial Teacher Education, Tales for the 21st century

1. Introduction

Using tales for pedagogical purposes has a long history as they offer numerous advantages to teachers and material designers. Particularly for language teachers, they are valuable authentic materials to facilitate teaching and learning process [2], [3]. With appropriate adaptations, they can be suitable for all age groups and all proficiency levels while teaching language skills. Since they are usually short with their simple plots and a few characters, they can be focused on in one or two teaching sessions and they can give opportunities for several communicative activities or tasks, ranging from drama to creative writing. Their themes are mostly universal which can easily be comprehended. By using tales as alternative materials, teachers can motivate their learners and encourage them to participate more in classroom interaction. Since tales are accompanied with storytelling techniques, the soothing effect of the technique is immediately felt and the classroom becomes a place where all learners and teachers share the same content in a humanistic atmosphere. Tales are also convenient tools to be used to convey universal values such as love, friendship, justice, tolerance, affection, cooperation and security. What is more, they are much easily accessible with today's technology.

As for the learners, tales are appealing because they trigger their curiosity and imagination. As valuable materials, they bring a variety to the course book based routine of the classroom. In a language lesson with a tale, there can be more reasons for real communication. While they listen, read, talk and write, they ask, answer, express and exchange ideas in a meaningful context. They get surprised, make guesses and have the chance to take risks with the language they are learning. Moreover, they learn more about life, people and other cultures by questioning different opinions and attitudes, which can lead to the development of their critical thinking skills essential for the enhancement of their personal growth.

Bearing the above-mentioned benefits of tales in mind, it might be useful for teachers and teacher educators to pay a special attention to the use of tales as language teaching materials. Firstly, revisiting the tales in terms of their setting, life styles, characters and moral teaching can bring the necessity for new approaches [4], [5]. Using the traditional texts without making any change in their content and without considering the moral values that can be drawn from them may be far from meeting the expectations of the children of the 21st century who live in an entirely different world. As a consequence of the technological revolution, today's children are born to a world under the dominant influence of information and communication technology (ICT). Hence, the world they live in is absolutely different from the settings presented in the tales. They are urbanized and technologically

literate individuals. In this respect, presenting them the tales in their traditional forms without making any change may work well once or twice in the classroom. However, the same tales can become much more appealing for them if they are presented with some adaptations or changes that can be done for characters, settings and life styles reflecting the traits of the modern world. First of all, new settings such as towns, cities, parks, schools, the planets in the space may be preferred as children are more familiar with these locations. There can be a special focus on environmental issues for the sake of a clean and better world. The technology and its tools can be part of tales as children are skillful technology users. The characters, both human and nonhuman, can be reconsidered critically and any kind of gender, religious and ethnic discrimination can be avoided. In this way, the moral values transmitted from tales can be more effective. It can be easier for children to understand others' wishes, expectations, fears and troubles. Through tales, they can realize that all humans deserve love, affection, hope and safety.

Such a contemporary perspective toward tales brings new responsibilities to both teachers and teacher educators. One-way to be followed can be revisiting the traditional tales with a critical look discussed above and make the necessary adaptations for classroom use. After the adaptations, which can address the students' needs, several language activities can be designed. Another way is to write new tales for the 21st century children. Both ways can enrich the repertoires of teachers and teacher candidates. This study aims to share the experience of teacher educators who asked the teacher candidates to write the 21st century tales.

2. Teacher candidates as the writers of the 21st century tales

The aim of this task is to raise an awareness on the necessity of writing new tales in line with the changing life styles of the 21st century, help them appreciate the value of tales as teaching materials and finally foster their creative writing skills.

Firstly, the teacher educators initiated a discussion on the advantages of using tales as teaching materials. The candidates focused on the pedagogical benefits of using tales and listed them relying on readings, research findings and their own views as experienced learners. Then, they were invited to look at the tales critically and they questioned the well-known tales by taking the needs and expectations of today's children. During the discussion sessions, they came to the point that it would be more useful to adapt the tales or to write the new ones.

In order to put the discussion points into practice, the teacher candidates in the Departments of Turkish Language Teaching and English Language Teaching were asked to write their own tales which could reflect the characteristics of today's world. Before they wrote, the brainstorming sessions took place and the messages to be given through tales were listed in a concept mapping activity. The candidates agreed that the themes or messages had to be universal like the ones given in the traditional ones. One group worked with peers and the other group preferred individual work. They were given enough time to complete the task. In the next sessions, they read and listened to each other's products, which initiated new discussions.

The teacher candidates' tales include the following changes:

Characters:
1. They use both human and nonhuman characters like the ones in traditional ones, again with human traits. The human characters still struggle with difficulties with or without the support of nonhuman characters. The nonhuman ones are usually animals, trees, robots, viruses and visitors from other planets.
2. The main characters usually find smart ways while coping with the difficulties or fighting with the evil or other supernatural powers by using the technology.
3. If the teacher candidate is female, the main character is usually female who is able to fulfill the actions or activities expected from a protagonist.
4. Some characters are unemployed and looking for unusual job alternatives. While doing so, they make use of technology.
5. The characters are highly sensitive to environmental issues; the ones who give harm to environment are either severely punished or ridiculed.
6. Some of the characters who are suffering from loneliness are in need of good friends and thoughtful parents and siblings.
7. Even the protagonists make serious mistakes from time to time, and try to correct themselves immediately.
8. Some characters are immigrants who miss their own places. They are usually in hopeless situations waiting for a welcoming hand.

9. The protagonists are not royal or noble. They are ordinary people who use their wisdom and skills.

Settings:
1. Most of the tales take place in crowded and polluted urban areas.
2. The rooms and studies of the characters, libraries, school canteens, internet cafes and bookstores are among the settings.
3. Some settings are terraces, gardens, small or huge parks, forests, and even rain forests.
4. The planets, oceans, polar region and utopic countries are favorite places of setting.
5. The setting of time is ambiguous, just like the one in traditional tales.

Lifestyles:
1. The characters use the technology to cope with the problems. For instance, a young boy who has already designed the best computer can immediately learn what is happening to the polar animals and rush to help them. A little girl can find a well-paid job in Bestland for her father by using her technological skills. A turtle can find a reasonable accommodation in a green park by using the internet.
2. The life is usually hectic because of the problems such as unemployment, housing, low income, loneliness, violence and environmental pollution. For instance, although the ant is highly qualified and hardworking, it cannot find a good job and decides to look for a job in a far planet. The cat always takes part in demonstrations to protest the nuclear power plants. The boy, fed up with living in a tall building without friends, organizes a camping school in a forest where he can spend good time with his friends. The bear decides to open an organic honey shop to increase his income.
3. It is felt that violence, injustice or any kind of discrimination is not tolerated. The ones involved with violence and injustice are the losers at the end and the victims of violent or unfair events somehow win.
4. In the tales, the impact of communication via technology and fast travelling is seen. The characters exchange news quickly, access information and can go wherever they want by modern vehicles like trains, planes, space ships. Even the bicycles are capable of sailing or flying.
5. There are families, relatives and friend groups but usually under the pressure of the social or personal problems. The solutions to the problems are usually found by the main character with the support of the others. Hence, both individual attempts and cooperation are valued.
6. The tales are full of humor, irony and even sarcasm, which reflect the attitudes of the candidates. Most of them have happy ends stemmed from fairness, good intentions, good amount of knowledge and technological skills.
7. The characters of the tales with a lot of social criticism are chosen from the animals like the ones in fables and this gives the writer the freedom of saying more.

3. Conclusion
Encouraging candidate teachers to write their own tales has showed their capabilities to create and the skills they can use while developing materials. Such an experience, first of all, gave them the chance of looking at the traditional tales with a critical look. As they read and listened to their peers' tales, they witnessed how they saw the world from their own windows. Their tales reflected their own problems, concerns, wishes and solutions related to the world or society in which they live. They attempted to link their imagination with the real life concerns. Most of them chose optimism, tolerance, hope, friendship, cooperation and peace as themes. Although they were not asked to pay attention to age or proficiency levels, they designed their tales suitable for children.

After such an experience, the next step can be revising the tales for classroom use and planning teaching activities by focusing on the integrated language skills. The revisions can be done in groups collaboratively with the support of the teacher educator. The activities based on the tales can be presented in micro teaching sessions followed by feedback part, which gives way to self-evaluation and peer evaluation. They can exchange their tales to keep for future classroom use. Finally, when they start to teach in real classrooms, they can make their students write new tales.

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