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Children's Literature: From the Heritage Source to the Educational-Pedagogical Source - Toward a Foundational Paradigm for the Didactics of Folktales in the School Curriculum –

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***Abstract*—**This study offers a critical reading of children's literary texts included in reading textbooks used at the primary and middle-school levels. It examines how the folktale—a repository of cultural, intellectual, social, and psychological knowledge—is transformed into teaching material through the epistemological and methodological processes of didactic transposition.

The aim is to draw on the experiences and meanings embodied in folktales within an educational practice guided by applied pedagogy, and to assess the curricular outcomes of that practice. The textbook thus serves as a bridge between heritage, understood as a living memory, and younger generations, who bear responsibility for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage from disappearance, particularly in an increasingly virtual, technological, and digital world.

***Keywords*—**children's literature; folktales; didactic transposition; pedagogy; curriculum; textbook…

Introduction and Research Problem

The movement of oral folk narratives from their status as a cultural heritage resource to their use as an educational and pedagogical resource involves successive stages of conceptualization and contextualization.

This transformation makes the folktale a form of knowledge that can be taught and learned. It entails didactic adaptation to the new setting of the curriculum and textbook, in accordance with conditions of selection and treatment related to pupils' ages, natural aptitudes, and targeted competencies.

The process therefore raises a fundamental question: Is the text offered to the pupil an identical reproduction of the original tale, or an adaptation modeled on the conventions of stories for children?

Research problem: Does the didactic dimension subsume the literary and cultural themes of folktale narrative, or does it develop those themes by restructuring the tale and reformulating its functions?

Objectives

- To identify the changes accompanying the folktale's passage from the heritage context in which it emerged to an educational context, and to examine the knowledge produced by this textual transfer.
- To examine the folktale's morphological structure as a distinctive narrative form and the reshaping of literary knowledge into an educational objective.
- To assess the relationship between creative writing inspired by folktales and children's reception of such writing, including the critical work needed to develop children's literature.
- To identify the didactic mechanisms used to incorporate folktales into the reading texts prescribed by the curriculum.

The epistemological project of didactic transposition can be defined as "an operational process through which knowledge is transferred from its scholarly level to a level at which it can be taught" (Mouhcine, 2024, p.267).

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Through the textbook, educational institutions organize the teaching–learning environment to produce school knowledge (savoir scolaire). This process systematically transfers knowledge, culture, and values from what we call the heritage source to the pedagogical source, enabling pupils not only to receive and understand that knowledge but also to use it productively.

Such an endeavor requires curriculum designers, teachers, and educational supervisors to analyze teaching situations. Theoretical frameworks must respond to learners' ages and cultural and ideological backgrounds.

Accordingly, educational practice reformulates discourse as an adaptable teaching text, simplifying it and reducing complexities or gaps that could confuse pupils or discourage them from reading this kind of material.

Introducing folktales into curricular reading texts is therefore an act of adaptation that must respond creatively to the social and cultural environment. The pupil should not feel disconnected from the demands of the present or from lived experience.

The growing presence of folktales in reading programs has nevertheless prompted contrasting positions. One view emphasizes preserving the original narrative form and its themes; another argues that strict adherence to an initial version may be ill-suited to a technologically transformed world.

Adaptation need not entail a break with the popular narrative inheritance. On the contrary, narrative substitutions may give rise to a new history of storytelling while retaining traces of the community's mentalities, culture, sense of belonging, and imagination.

Since the tale is an accumulated and repeatedly transmitted narrative form, its inclusion in the textbook should cultivate an informed understanding of heritage. Educational authorities must also scrutinize the content selected for pupils and avoid transmitting unexamined biases or concealed ideological assumptions. Their purpose is to strengthen pupils' awareness rather than simply to deliver information.

For example, the Ogre (ghoul) of traditional narratives may be compared with contemporary figures such as Superman or the robot. Could this contrast generate a new form of digital storytelling closer to the world familiar to today's children?

The appropriateness of such substitutions depends on the educational and evaluative requirements of the teaching text. In the folktales discussed here, the ghoul is an imaginary, often monstrous figure associated with evil, domination, and fear; its frightening features, harsh voice, sharp fangs, and enormous body are part of its traditional representation.

Pedagogy and Didactics

Any discussion of education and curricula requires conceptual precision, particularly in distinguishing pedagogy from didactics. Pedagogy (la pédagogie) is the study of educational practice and draws on several disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and statistics. It should not, however, be confused with education (l'éducation).

Education has been described as a dynamic and integrated process of developing the individual's emotional, ethical, intellectual, spiritual, and physical capacities; it may also be understood as the processes through which adults guide children in acquiring dispositions and habits.

Pedagogy, by contrast, is theoretical inquiry that accumulates knowledge about educational methods, techniques, and phenomena in order to propose approaches for educational practice (Sadeqi, 2012, p.57).

Didactics is a domain within pedagogy that focuses on the means and methods used to present knowledge as subject matter for teaching. In Arabic, the French term didactique has been rendered by several expressions, including "instruction," "the science of teaching," "the science of education," and "didactics" (Ibrir, 2002, p.43).

The field addresses two interrelated questions: "What should we teach?" and "How should we teach it?" (Ibrir, 2002, p.43). The ***first*** concerns the material to be taught, both quantitatively and qualitatively, including its syntactic, semantic, and lexical dimensions. The ***second*** concerns adapting that material to learners: identifying their needs, interests, and characteristics, then presenting ideas in forms of language and concepts they can comprehend. This also entails the selection of objectives, teaching strategies, and learning resources. Psychology, educational science, learning theory, measurement, and assessment all contribute to these concerns.

The Folktale as an Educational Resource

From a Heritage Source to a Teaching Resource

The first transformation concerns the nature of the text: the passage from oral performance to writing. In oral storytelling, words, formulas, and incidents may be repeated, and narrators may tell

the same story in different ways.

Once the spoken narrative becomes a written text for reading or independent study in a textbook, the book mediates between author and learner. The original oral situation depends on the physical presence of a narrator and on a shared cultural context.

In this context, familiar dialect words and expressions acquire particular meanings; in textbooks, they may be replaced by Modern Standard Arabic, the official language of schooling.

Folktales in the Didactic Context: Heritage in the Curriculum

Treating folktales as source material for school texts brings into focus the processes that have sustained them. Transmission from generation to generation and from narrator to narrator has shaped the history of narratives that express peoples' aspirations, hopes, suffering, and disappointments.

Folktales are not the creations of single, identifiable authors; they are collective works that form a cultural memory, recording communities' fears, dreams, and changing interpretations of life. They are also a mode of reflection through the popular imagination.

As Buthayna Al-Nasiri observes, the folktale is a kind of "daydream of peoples": with its wonders and happy endings, it imagines a better life and compensates for human suffering and failure (Al-Nasiri, 2017, p.2).

Comparison between the original orally transmitted story and its later institutional form makes it possible to observe the changes arising when the tale moves from popular circulation into formal schooling.

Didactic transposition requires conceptual, methodological, and operational frameworks suited to the educational situation. Its starting point is the folktale as a body of knowledge, with its original structures and components; the task is to trace its passage into pedagogical practice.

Turning a folktale into a text suitable for a reading textbook changes that body of knowledge through several stages. The original folktale is a pre-existing form of knowledge. To become part of a prescribed school text, it must undergo processes that affect its content, meanings, and cognitive structure. These stages may be distinguished as follows:

School knowledge: Knowledge organized by curricula to achieve specified educational aims. Its content and structure are determined through programs, guidance documents, and ministerial instructions.

Acquired knowledge: The practical knowledge that pupils develop through learning (see Mouhcine, 2024, p. 267). Acquisition is not merely the storage of what has been taught; it involves mental processes of interpretation, recontextualization, and creative application.

Taught knowledge: The story as it is actually presented in a textbook and taught by the teacher according to an organized learning sequence.

Increasing attention to childhood has deepened understanding of children's distinct worlds and the sensitivities of this developmental stage. Educational strategies have consequently sought not only to provide knowledge but also to develop children's capacities for thinking.

Children's literature has become a subject of study in universities and institutes, reflecting its place within educational planning. Understanding the substance, importance, and functions of literature for children helps educators respond to their needs and develop the skills required for teaching. Although children's literature is a comparatively recent field of organized literary and educational study, myths, fables, and folktales are among its historical antecedents.

Scholars differ in their definitions of children's literature. It is generally recognized as part of humanity's literary and cultural history, addressed to a particular readership and combining aesthetic qualities with educational functions.

Knowles and Malmkjær define it broadly as writing published for children, including fiction intended for young adults, while Hunt argues that its boundaries cannot be established by textual content or style alone; attention must also be paid to its readers (Leonardi, 2020, p.11).

The field therefore cannot be understood merely as a literary genre: its cultural and pedagogical functions are equally significant. Ahmed Zalat describes it as literature inherited from the past, belonging to the present, and directed toward the future because it accompanies a long stage of human life (Zalat, 1997, p.25).

Writing for children must accordingly take account of age, cognitive development, comprehension, accessible language, and the use of imagery.

Perspectives on Children's Literature

Childhood is a foundational period for inspiration, memory, and creativity. Experiences that may seem simple at the time can shape ways of imagining and understanding the world, both immediately and later in life.

Childhood also provides a store of knowledge that individuals draw on when adapting to new situations. George Orwell's reflections in "*Why I Write*" suggest how an early imaginative life can influence a writer's later identity. He recalls:

"*From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books*" (Orwell, 2005).

The passage illustrates how the cognitive, perceptual, and emotional formation of childhood may continue to shape personality in adulthood.

An examination of literature written for children must therefore return to cultural traditions as an early source of storytelling.

Spoken tales were subsequently transformed into images, illustrations, and written narratives. Cinderella, Mowgli, Peter Rabbit, and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz are examples that have become part of the imaginative life of many societies.

Their significance extends beyond the relationship between childhood and storytelling to early human modes of thought that also produced mythic narratives and representations of deities.

Examples of Stories Included in School Textbooks

Folktales are an inherited body of narrative whose continuity should be preserved. Including them in the curriculum can revive the intimacy of family storytelling circles, with their warmth and capacity to strengthen human bonds—an experience increasingly challenged by the pace of digital life.

Can their presence in textbooks therefore reinvigorate cultural memory and protect it against the pressures of global change? The question itself suggests the answer.

Juha and the Sultan

"Juha and the Sultan," adapted by Rajab ben Mohammed from the Juha stories, appears in the seventh unit of the fifth-year primary-school Arabic reading textbook, under the theme "Stories and Tales from Heritage." It tells of a poor man, Juha, who lives with his wife in the kingdom of Nahavand.

After years of severe drought, they travel in search of a livelihood. On returning, Juha learns that the king has promised a reward to anyone who can bring him a bird to eat, a delicacy he has long been unable to enjoy.

Juha decides to take one of his two geese to the palace. The palace guard tries to buy the goose and present it himself, but Juha recognizes the scheme and refuses. After repeated attempts, they agree to share the reward. Once Juha has been admitted to the palace, he asks the king to allow him to clean the courtyard.

Halfway through, he requests that the guard complete the task, thereby honoring their agreement. When Juha explains what happened, the king admires his cleverness and rewards him generously (National Office for School Publications, 2019, p.116).

As a humorous anecdote, the story highlights Juha's intelligence, resourcefulness, and ability to escape difficult situations through wit and satire—the defining features of many Juha adventures.

Folktales can also foster qualities of fair leadership and help children develop self-protection skills, emotional intelligence, and patience (Srihati et al., 2025, p.7).

Children's literature additionally introduces learners to cultures and traditions beyond their own. Reading tales from different societies enables pupils to learn about other customs, beliefs, and ways of life.

For example, a Japanese folktale may provide an opportunity to discuss Japanese values, broaden pupils' perspectives, and encourage tolerance (Abuo Afash, 2024, p.126).

These are functional dimensions of storytelling. At the pedagogical level, the curriculum emphasizes two principal approaches: the competency-based approach and the systemic approach (National Curriculum Commission, 2016, p.7).

The former enables learners to mobilize integrated resources to solve a range of related problem situations (National Curriculum Commission, 2016, p.7). "Juha and the Sultan" lends itself

to the development of such competencies.

Loundja, the Ogre's Daughter

The tale "Loundja, the Ogre's Daughter," included on pages 20–34 of Tell Us a Story, Storyteller: Tales from Algerian Folk Heritage, is narrated by Grandmother Hadjila to children eager to hear about the adventures of a young man who seeks the beautiful Loundja. He journeys from one kingdom to another before entering the ogre's fortress through a narrow opening that requires agility.

Loundja agrees to flee with the king's son. Their return is beset by difficulties, among them the abduction of the young man by a giant eagle. Loundja and the inhabitants of the kingdom believe him dead and fall into despair.

A smaller eagle, previously rescued from the giant bird by the king, then reveals the prince's whereabouts to Loundja. Ultimately, the hero escapes and returns to his kingdom, where he and Loundja live happily (Dhaif Allah, 2023, pp.20-34).

In the second-year middle-school French textbook, a related version appears under the title "Loundja, la fille du roi" ("Loundja, the King's Daughter"), opening with the traditional formula Il était une fois ("Once upon a time") (National Office for School Publications, 2018, p.47). Its events have been modified, although the ending remains broadly similar. In both versions, suspense centers on the fate of the ogre, the young man, and Loundja.

Retaining the names of Loundja and the ogre helps sustain the connection with inherited narrative traditions. The tale thus moves from referential knowledge in its heritage setting to school knowledge: its modifications are didactic adaptations required by the learning process.

The resulting learning objectives include understanding the text's meaning and purpose. Through classroom activities, the teacher assesses comprehension while developing children's literary, artistic, and critical appreciation.

Azza and Mazouza

The story of "Azza and Mazouza" illustrates the two literary functions traditionally associated with Plato and Aristotle: pleasure and utility (Tatarkiewicz, 2005, p.170). It also appears in the seventh unit, "Stories and Tales from Heritage."

In an orally transmitted version, narration begins with the conventional Algerian formula Hajitak majitak, a ritual opening that signals the start of a tale, followed by an indefinite time setting such as "Long ago."

The oral version recounts a mother goat living in the forest with her two kids, Azza and Mazouza. Each day she leaves to graze and returns in the evening with food and water. At the door she sings a familiar refrain: "Open the door, I am back! I have brought water in my jug, milk in my udder, and fodder between my horns." These words act as a code by which the kids recognize their mother.

The textbook retells this episode differently: "Before going out each morning, the mother goat warned them: 'Beware, my little ones, of wild animals, especially the cunning wolf. Do not open the door to anyone unless you hear my gentle voice, see my two white hooves, and hear me say: Azza, Mazouza, open the door!'" (National Office for School Publications, 2019, p.112; translated from Arabic). The plot exposes the wolf's deceitful attempts to devour the young goats.

A comparison of these versions reveals both additions and omissions, through which the folktale acquires the features required of a school reading text.

The narrative moral is the lesson derived from the tale, commonly expressed as an educational or ethical message. In didactic terms, it becomes a learning objective governing reading performance and comprehension.

In the initial phase of a lesson, pupils may examine the picture accompanying the text; the teacher then presents the title and gathers their initial ideas as hypotheses to be tested. During the construction of learning, questions and discussion guide comprehension.

Pupils subsequently apply what they have learned through activities that help them identify meanings and principal ideas, connect new information with existing knowledge, and construct a coherent body of understanding. Reading without understanding fails to fulfill its essential purpose—a point illustrated by the saying attributed to Edmund Burke: "Reading without understanding is like eating without digesting" (as cited in Van Dyke, 1883, p.51).

The expected outcome must therefore be evaluated in more than a narrow sense. Learning is not confined to recalling the events or extracting a moral; it should also produce linguistic, narrative, literary, and cultural

knowledge. Lesson objectives must reflect this broader conception.

Stages of Didactic Transformation

- The narrative resource: the orally transmitted folktale in its original form.
- Text selection: assessing suitability for textbook inclusion, especially in relation to age and comprehension.
- Textual and linguistic adaptation.
- Textual reconstruction: shortening the tale, preserving its values and moral, and reorganizing its structure.
- Curricular integration: using the tale as a reading passage or extended-reading text.
- Design of the learning situation and classroom practice.
- Learning activities undertaken by pupils.
- Assessment of learning.
- The resulting reading competence and the tale's effect on learning.
- The folktale's morphological shift from literature as narrative to literature with educational and didactic functions.
- The stages from oral narration, to formation and circulation, to didactic treatment.
- The contrast between the storyteller's oral performance—including tales passed down by grandmothers—and the written text.
- The movement from cultural narrative themes to learning resources, including changes in language, dialect, and style.
- The comparison of oral and written narrative forms at multiple levels.

Analytical Framework for Comparing Folktales and School Texts

The following table summarizes the questions, didactic requirements, and observable transformations used to examine stories as they move from the popular narrative tradition into classroom instruction.

Table 1. Points of analysis for examining folktales across the didactic transformation process.

Didactic requirement	Guiding question	Observable transformations
Conceptual identification	What distinguishes the traditional folktale from the story printed in the textbook?	Each form has different features; the move from folktale to textbook story requires specific adaptations.
Didactic transposition	What transformations enable a folktale to become a teaching text in an Arabic or French textbook? How does it become a reading resource within a didactic situation?	• Condensing, reorganizing, and rewriting episodes • Shifts in linguistic register • Adaptation of characters, names, and actions • Modifications of the plot • Dialectal spoken language versus the official written language • A live narrator or storyteller versus a written text • Multiple oral variants versus a relatively standardized version • Omission of incidents • An unchanged or revised ending
Attention to learners' comprehension	How can achievement of the lesson's comprehension goals be measured?	• Comprehension of the reading text • Ability to express ideas • Expansion of imaginative capacities • Development of literary appreciation
Relational dimension: the didactic triangle	How does transforming the folktale affect the nature of learning?	Literary competence should not stop at identifying the subject and events or completing grammar exercises. Comprehension should involve constructive knowledge-building rather than feedback alone.
Coherence and progression of assessment activities	Can the pupil participate in presenting a summary of the story?	Interaction with oral and written language, including reading aloud and responding to the text.
Literary themes and narrative structure	What are the decisive points in the movement from oral narration to written text?	Do not reduce the tale to extracting ideas or morals. Consider narrative structure and the distinctive features of each story.

Conclusion:

- Returning to heritage narratives does not diminish the dynamism of children's thought. Rather, it strengthens their sense of identity and belonging while providing insight into humanity's cultural inheritance and their own social environment.
- The folktale enters a process of pedagogical reconstruction, moving from its original heritage form to teaching material with objectives and strategies defined by didactic transposition.
- The examples examined demonstrate that folktales can be integrated into textbook reading activities as effective pedagogical resources; no inherent barrier prevents their use in teaching.

- Their integration also raises questions about the transmission of heritage in an age of rapidly expanding technologies and digital environments. Traditional texts and versions may recede, and even their protagonists may be replaced—for example, the ghoul by the robot and Loundja by the generic princess. Does such distance from the original narrative truly serve children's educational development?

Recommendations:

The inclusion of folktales in the curriculum deserves more sustained and in-depth attention. Their passage from heritage to teaching resources should not strip them of the elements from which human imagination and reflection first emerged: wonder, fantasy, the creation of models and representations, and transmission across generations.

The original narratives provided the seeds from which new themes and contemporary ways of imagining have grown. Engaging with this literature can help children develop the intellectual and cultural foundations needed to respond to new circumstances and situations in everyday life.

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