

Philosophical Conversation

In the early years

By Dr Sofia Nikolidaki, University of Crete, Department of Preschool Education

Let's get into the fairy tale!

Teacher: Do you remember the fairy tale we read yesterday? What would you like to do with it?

Giorgos: Miss, I would love to get into the fairy tale! (Many children happily agree)

Teacher: Oh, how can we do that?

George K: You have to find the wizards

Teacher: Which wizards? Where are they?

Dimis: They are in Athens.

Giorgos: If there is a theatrical play and you come across it then go and ask them how they do their tricks. You will learn from them.

George K: Yes, also you need a magic wand to get us in the fairy tale. It's simple!

Teacher: Oh, it's that simple!

Panos: But you have to ask them how to get out of the fairy tale!

Teacher: Sure! I don't want your parents looking for you in the pages of the fairy tale when they come to pick you up.

Michael: But the fairy tale is in the computer. Can we get in the computer too?

Panos: Yes, with a camera.

Giorgos: Or skype. We can skype with our parents!

Costance: My mum will look for me and if she doesn't find me she will get upset.

Panos: Then we should tell the parents.

John: Yes, we can phone them.

Teacher: From where? From the fairy tale? Hi parents, we are in the fairy tale at the moment.

Giorgos: Yes, we can phone them when we are in the fairy tale. I have a magic phone! But they can come with us. The wizard can put all of us in the fairy tale and then he will get us out. It is simple!

Dimis: When we are in the fairy tale you can record a cd and you can give it to our parents so they will see that we are in the fairy tale!

Teacher: Can we really get in the fairy tale?

Chrissa: Of course!

Costance: (ready to start crying) I don't want to get into the fairy tale. (Helen doesn't want to either).

George K: We can get in the fairy tale with our mind (Eleutheria likes that option too).

Teacher: What does that mean?

Dimis: In our imagination

Irene: We can see the fairy tale in a dream

George K: That's fake! I want to get in the fairy tale for real.

Teacher's food for thinking

I had promised the children we would get back to the picture book we had discussed the day before but didn't have time to work on it further. That way children could: (a) bring the fairy tale back to their memory (b) select activities and ways of working on the fairy tale (c) realize that a fairy tale can be an ongoing process with many follow-up activities.

George K. suggests getting into the fairy tale. This idea is very imaginative and there are many supporters. I ask children how this is possible and I get imaginative answers from them too.

Children seem to have confused in their minds the wizards of the fairy tales with the actors on theatrical plays who pretend to be the wizards. Their responses have empirical and magic elements which reflect their way of thinking and how they experience the knowledge they have.

The discussion above reflects both children's realistic and magical thinking. Children mix fantasy with reality. On the one hand, children want to get into the fairy tale, on the other hand they want to know how to get out of it so they will not be trapped and separated from their parents. Children also get confused with reality and virtual reality. Children are used to technology. Answers such as "you can record a cd and you can give this to our parents so they will see that we are in the fairy tale!" and "skype with our parents" show that the limits between reality and magic reality or fantasy are not clearly stated.

When I asked children how parents would know that we are in the fairy tale, the answers again mixed reality with fantasy (give them a call, use a magic telephone, use skype or a camera, let wizards bring the parents into the fairy tale). Children seem to consider such matters as very practical and trivial for a

wizard to perform. Children seem to take for granted the existence of wizards who have magic powers that could be applied in new technologies too (e.g. bring the parents into a two-dimensional environment).

Children have seen themselves in photos and videos saved in their parents' laptops or phones. Some children are scared of being trapped inside a fairy tale and prefer to think of it only as a fantasy. This is illustrated from answers such as (let's imagine it/ dream of it/ jump in the fairytale through our mind). On the other hand, others would prefer a physical and more realistic way of getting into the fairy tale.

There is a lot to consider:

- Are children's discussions meaningful?
- Are they philosophical?
- Shall we make clear to the children what belongs to reality and what to fantasy? Is it always easy to distinguish?
- Where are the border lines between fantasy and reality? Where does reality stop and fantasy start from?
- If an idea is in the mind but doesn't exist in the real world, does it exist? Is it real or not?

I remember watching the film where Mary Poppins jumps, with the children, into a piece of art! I considered it as a simple thing to do and I wished I could be in a work of art with Mary Poppins! Who can guarantee that something that is still in the state of mind and seems crazy or impossible will not become real (in some sense) in the near future? Flying with airplanes, being able to communicate with people all over the world and watching them in real time through the internet belonged to fantasy some years ago. Who can guarantee that traveling "for real" in imaginary spaces will not be possible in the future?

Concepts: Possible and impossible, reality and fantasy

- Can we jump into a fairytale?
- Can you think of something that is impossible? What would that be?
- If you think of something impossible, does this impossible thing somehow exist? In what way?
- Can you draw the impossible? If you draw it, does it become possible?
- Can something real become unreal or imaginary? Give examples.
- Can something imaginary become real? Give examples.
- Can something be real and imaginary at the same time? Give examples.

Are they real? Do they exist?

Are they real?	Yes	No	?
Santa Claus			
The Tooth fairy			
An idea			
Dinosaurs			
Wizards			
Little red riding hood			

Do they exist?	Yes	No	?
Santa Claus			
The Tooth fairy			
An idea			
Dinosaurs			
Wizards			
Little red riding hood			

Are any of your answers different in the two tables?

What would happen if?

Allow children to think and discuss imaginary situations using the following table. They can state the positive and negative consequences. Children can also offer their own examples.

What would happen if you ...	Positive	Negative	?
Jumped into a fairytale			
Became invisible			
Died and relived			
Became a cartoon			
Travelled to the moon or further in space			
Counted all the stars that exist			

Is it possible to ...?

	Possible	Impossible	?
cure all illnesses?			
end death?			
know what others think of you?			
remember everything?			
travel all over the world?			
travel in space?			
become a superhero?			
acquire magic powers?			
sleep for a week?			
eat all the sweets you like?			
play all the games that exist in the world?			
get in contact with an alien?			
become friend with an alien?			
make everyone good?			
Get rid of unfairness?			

Further activities

- Write a list of impossible things.
- Draw something that is impossible (Question: Is it possible to draw something that is impossible?)
- Allow children to pick a fairy tale, a work of art or something else that they would love to jump into. Ask them to justify their choices.
- Draw a magical place you would like to jump into. Why would you go there? What would you do there? Are there people you would love to take with you?