

Narrating and Reading Folktales and Picture Books: Storytelling Techniques and Approaches with Preschool Children

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Abstract

This article examines the approaches to storytelling used by Greek parents with their preschool children. The first part of the article discusses the types of stories chosen and the reading approaches employed by the parents. The second part examines the extratextual interactions between parents and children related to content during storytelling. One hundred twelve stories were chosen by parents and told to their preschool children in one-to-one settings in their homes. These sessions were recorded by students and later analyzed. The families chose the stories, and no recommendation was made to parents about the type of story or approach they would use to tell the story. The stories were classified as *narration*, which involved telling stories to children without using books, or *story reading*, which involved reading books. Results indicate that the way in which a story was told and the characteristics of the extratextual interactions between parents and children depended on a parent's educational status. Almost all parents with a higher educational background employed story reading, whereas parents with a lower educational background mostly preferred narration. The quantity and quality of verbal exchanges between adults and children during storytelling were also affected by the approach used and the educational status of the parents. Reading stories motivated more verbal exchanges than narrating stories. Extratextual interactions during storytelling were more common among parents with a higher educational background than among parents with a lower educational background; however, of the total number of extratextual interactions, only a small percentage were categorized as high-level abstraction (bridging, elaboration, and predicting). Most extratextual interactions were described as low-level abstraction (children's feedback, asking for label, intervention for drawing attention, and clarifying), regardless of the approach employed by the parents or their educational status. Results suggest that for the Greek families involved in this research, storytelling is a child-centered activity that meets the entertainment needs of the child.

Introduction

Early research found a positive relationship between storytelling to preschool children and their future linguistic and academic development (Chomsky, 1972; Durkin, 1966). This finding generated a series of studies that investigated the characteristics of storytelling by parents to children and the contribution of storytelling to children's literacy development.

Storytelling to children is a social practice that is common in Western societies but forbidden in many other cultures because in these cultures stories are considered to be lies (Heath, 1982). Observation of various Western educational and economic strata indicates significant differences with regard to the frequency and quality (type, content, purpose) of children's experiences with stories. Adams (1996) estimated children's experience with picture books at the beginning of school life at 1000 to 1700 hours for average middle-class children and just 25 hours for lower-class children.

Other researchers found that the frequency of storytelling by parents to children during the preschool years was positively associated with children's language development and school progress (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002; Campbell, 2001; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994; McCormick & Mason, 1994; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992; Wells, 1986). In addition, research suggests that the contribution of storytelling to a child's literacy development is dependent on the quantity and quality of language interaction between adults and children during storytelling. This view is supported both by theory and research.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children acquire intellectual and linguistic skills through social interaction. In Western societies, reading to children has been a typical form of social interaction between adults and children. During the process of reading stories, parents do not simply read

but often describe pictures, name objects, explain facts, ask children questions, and associate stories with children's experiences (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998). Thus, they create a context that enhances children's development and promotes linguistic and intellectual development, beyond what children can achieve by themselves. On the other hand, some studies have suggested that a child's active involvement in reading stories (before, after, and during reading) is instrumental in first-language learning and makes children familiar with decontextualized language (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Dickinson & Smith, 1994), which is essential to literacy.

Research that examined parents' comments and questions while reading has demonstrated great variation, even among parents of the same social status, both in the number of extratextual statements used by parents and in the level of abstraction of the specific sentences (Stadler & McEvoy, 2003; Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; DeBaryshe, 1995). Hammett, van Kleeck, and Huberty (2003), in their study involving middle- to upper-class parents, concluded that during reading stories the majority of parents employed a few extratextual sentences. The specific sentences were relevant to the content of the story and were both of low-level abstraction (i.e., naming objects, highlighting objects or heroes in the story) and high-level abstraction (i.e., recalling information, predicting).

Neuman (1996) suggested that the abstraction level of the extratextual interaction occurring during reading stories was related to the parents' reading skills. Language interaction between children and parents with low reading skills was more frequent in terms of the categories that were characterized as low-level abstraction (i.e., reading simultaneously, phrase repetition), whereas language interaction between children and parents with higher reading skills was more frequent in terms of the categories that were characterized as high-level abstraction (i.e., relating the story to a child's daily life, recalling information). DeBaryshe (1995) noted that there was significant variation among the mothers participating in her research in terms of the extent of their children's involvement in discussion during reading. The participants tended to avoid specific techniques that were considered to be high-level abstraction (i.e., they asked few questions to which the answers required high-level abstraction).

Many researchers have studied the strategies that parents employ in order to accommodate reading to children's intellectual and linguistic levels (Wolf, 1991; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988; DeLoache & DeMendoza, 1987). Wolf (1991) studied the way her own daughter had been reacting to literature and concluded that a mother's questions during reading were modified according to a child's age and the child's familiarity with stories; thus, early questions such as "What's this?" were later replaced by questions such as "What do you think about...?" or "What would you do...?"

Phillips and McNaughton (1990) investigated the behavior of parents of higher social status and maintained that during story reading parents employed *scaffolding*. First, they made extratextual comments with a view to helping children get the gist of the story, and subsequently they motivated children to participate in the story by making their own comments. Linguistic interaction between adults and children also seems to be affected by the type of texts (Stadler & McEvoy, 2003; Neuman, 1996; Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brody, 1990). Stadler and McEvoy (2003) suggested that storybooks generated parents' comments that were relevant mostly to the content of the story (i.e., discussion of the story pictures, characters, facts, comments about children's experiences related to specific facts in the story). In contrast, alphabet books generated comments mostly about phonology (i.e., pronunciation of individual letters and syllables).

Variation among adults was also observed with regard to reading styles (Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Haden, Reese, and Fivush (1996) described three reading styles in terms of the content of extratextual sentences (describing, predicting, informing, confirming, letters) that mothers employed during story reading. The first style emphasized descriptions. The mothers who employed this style used many *describers*. The second style, which highlighted comprehension, involved many comments predicting the

development of plot and provided information on *comprehenders*. By employing the third style, which emphasized children's involvement in reading, mothers motivated children to make comments about the story and used *collaborators*.

The present study investigated the techniques that Greek families employed during storytelling to their preschool children. The first part discusses the story types chosen and storytelling techniques employed by Greek families with their preschool children, and the second part examines the extratextual interactions between parents and children during storytelling.

Part I: Story Types and Storytelling Techniques

Sample

The sample consisted of 112 families whose children went to five different nursery schools in Thessaloniki in which students of the Higher Technological Educational Institution of Thessaloniki do their training. First, the students met the children's parents. During these discussions, the students asked the parents whether they told their children stories. All 150 participants answered positively. Next, the students asked permission to record one of the stories that they usually told their children. Of the 150 parents, 112 agreed to participate. A time and date were arranged when students would visit the children's home to tape the storytelling. Before that day, the students visited the children at home twice in order to create a friendly atmosphere around the students, children, and parents. The number of recorded stories was 112; the choice of stories was exclusively made by the participants. The books used for the study belonged to the families, and no recommendation was made to parents about the type of story or approach they would use to tell a story. On the contrary, on the day when the recording was arranged, the parents were asked to read the story in their typical way. After the storytelling, the students made notes about the educational level of the adults, their relationship to the children, the children's ages, and, if a book was read, the basic details about the book (title, author, and edition). The duration of the storytelling was from 5 to 15 minutes. The duration was associated more with the quantity of the extratextual interactions between the parent and the child and less with the length of the text. According to the parents, the stories were familiar to the children, and they had been told by the parents many times. Of the adults, 12.5% had not graduated from senior high school, 61.6% were senior high school graduates, and 25.9% had a higher education degree. The stories were told to children ages 2 to 6 years.

Data Analysis

All the stories were recorded and included extratextual interactions by both adults and children before, after, and during storytelling. Subsequently, the stories were classified as *narration* or *story reading*, depending on the approach the parents employed. *Narration* involved telling stories to children without using books; *story reading* involved reading books, irrespective of the adult's extratextual interaction during reading. The statistical data analysis was performed using SPSS and involved descriptive statistics, frequency statistics, and cross-tabulation statistics with statistical indicators (chi-square, degrees of freedom, significance value). Level of significance was $p < 0.05$.

Results

Of the 112 stories, 51 (45.5%) were folktales, 49 (43.7%) short stories, 6 Aesop's tales, 3 Andersen's tales, and 3 improvised stories. Thirty of the stories were narrated, and 82 were read. Narration was basically used for folktales (22 of the 30 stories were folktales), whereas story reading was based on illustrated storybooks (of these, 29 were illustrated folktales). Five folktales were the most popular:

1. Little Red Riding Hood: 9 stories narrated and 6 read
2. The Three Little Pigs: 4 narrated and 5 read
3. The Wolf and the Seven Kids: 5 narrated and 3 read
4. Hansel and Gretel: 1 narrated and 3 read
5. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: 1 narrated and 2 read

The way the story was told depended on the storyteller's educational background (Table 1). Almost all participants with a higher educational background employed story reading, whereas participants with a lower educational background mostly preferred narration. For 110 out of 112 stories, there was extratextual interaction both by adults and children. There was great variation in the number of extratextual interactions, even for the same story. For example, during one telling of "Little Red Riding Hood," there was one extratextual interaction initiated by the adult and one by the child. On another occasion for the same tale, there were 8 extratextual interactions initiated by the adult and 20 by the child. During one telling of "The Three Little Pigs," there was one extratextual interaction by the adult and one by the child. The same tale received 24 extratextual interactions by an adult and 12 by a child during another telling.

Table 1
Number and Percentage of Narrators and Readers in Terms of Educational Level*

	Education					
	Senior High School		Higher		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Adults						
Narrators	27	32.5	3	10.3	30	26.8
Readers	56	67.5	26	89.7	82	73.2
Total	83	100	29	100	112	100

*Pearson chi-square: value 5.394, df 1; $p < 0.05$.

Overall, two trends were observed during storytelling:

- The story was told without interruptions; thus, adults tended to avoid asking questions, did not strike up conversations with the child, and, when there were questions, tended to give short answers and continued with the story. This pattern was observed particularly during narration.
- Children tended to be involved in the story, either impromptu—with questions, comments, or by adding up story segments—or by being challenged by adults—through questions, drawing children's attention to pictures, urging them to recall personal experiences or information, asking them to justify the characters' actions, etc.

In order to investigate the type of extratextual interactions occurring during storytelling, 88 stories were picked and analyzed in terms of the extratextual interactions involved.

Part II: Extratextual Interactions during Storytelling

Sample

In order to have as homogeneous a sample as possible, the stories that were analyzed were chosen according to the type of material (literary or general knowledge book) and the discourse type (fiction or poetry). Excluded were 11 informational stories, 2 stories in which no interaction took place, 5 stories in verse, and 6 picture books with very little text. Thus, the sample

comprised 88 entertaining literary texts. Of these, 58 were folktales, 21 of which were narrated and 34 read; 3 were improvised stories, which were narrated; 6 were Aesop's tales, which were read; and 24 short stories, which were read.

Coding Extratextual Interaction

The extratextual interactions involved in the stories were coded on the basis of content and were examined separately for parents and children. The specific coding procedure was based on other research on storytelling that examined adult and children's extratextual interaction (Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; Neuman, 1996; Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989). The specific procedure involved the following extratextual interaction categories:

1. *Attention*. Extratextual interaction with a view to drawing children's attention (by calling the children's names: "Can you hear, Irene?" or by drawing their attention to illustrations: "Can you see the dog?")
2. *Names*. Extratextual interaction with a view to making children familiar with the names of objects, incidents, characters, and setting ("This is a lion.")
3. *Asking about names*. Questions about the names of objects, incidents, characters, etc., of the story ("What is she wearing on her head?" "Where is the lion caged?")
4. *Feedback*. Extratextual interaction that aims at praising, confirming, or correcting children's extratextual interaction ("Yes, Snow White was pretty." "No, he was not dropping pebbles; he was dropping crumbs.")
5. *Repetition*. Verbatim repetition of children's words or phrases (child: "a dog"; parent: "a dog")
6. *Elaboration*. Extratextual interaction through which a child's words or phrases are elaborated by adding extra information (child: "a bee"; parent: "a flying bee")
7. *Organizing the activity*. Extratextual interaction through which children are kept intrigued by the story ("I'm going ahead.")
8. *Prediction*. Questions asked to a child with a view to giving information about facts and incidents in the story that have not yet been told ("What did the animals do next?")
9. *Relating the story to real life*. Commentary and questions to children with a view to relating the plot of the story to everyday experiences and informing them about facts and objects in the story ("What color is your own toothbrush?" "We drive a car; they used to drive a cart.")
10. *Recalling information*. Questions to children in order to make them recall incidents and details in the story.
11. *Clarifying*. Extratextual interaction with a view to motivating picture description, word explanation, and interpretation of characters' attitudes.
12. *Asking for clarification*. Questions that motivate children to describe or interpret the characters' attitudes in the story ("Why do you think they were happy?")

With regard to children's extratextual interaction, coding involved the following 9 of the 12 categories made by adults:

1. *Names*. Children name objects, incidents, characters ("a dog").
2. *Questions about names*. Children ask about names of objects, incidents, and characters ("What's this?").
3. *Repetition*. Children repeat the exact words or phrases that the narrator/reader had used.
4. *Relating the story to real life*. Children relate incidents in the story to their own personal

experiences ("I'll take out the thorn for you." "I want a watch like this for me, too.").

5. *Recalling information.* Children point out details in the story and give information (Parent: "What does a matchmaker do?" Child: "She finds grooms.")
6. *Prediction.* Children predict the development of the plot ("Now the wolf is going to come in.").
7. *Clarifying.* Children describe pictures and explain attitudes ("Here is the little pig going to his little brother.").
8. *Questions for clarification.* Children ask for explanations about incidents and attitudes ("What is little John doing?" "How did he go?").
9. *Parallel reading.* The category involves only children's extratextual interaction and "reading"/"narrating" words or phrases in the story, while parents are reading/narrating (Parent: "and Little Red Riding Hood set off..." Child: "...to go to her grandmother's.").

With regard to the reliability of coding interventions, the authors first categorized the extratextual interactions of five stories. Then they discussed the categories with three colleagues who had read the stories; no different opinions were expressed. The statistical analysis of the extratextual interactions was performed with SPSS and involved descriptive statistics, frequency statistics, and mean comparisons (independent samples *t*-test). Minimum level of significance was $p < 0.05$.

Results

The comparison of children's and adults' extratextual interactions—separately for narration and story reading—demonstrated that, with regard to narration, adults' extratextual interactions were less frequent than those of children. With regard to story reading, the number of adults' extratextual interactions was greater than the number of children's extratextual interactions (Tables 2 & 3).

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Adults' Extratextual Interactions in Terms of Approach and Narrators'/Readers' Education

Extratextual Interaction	Approach				Education			
	Narration		Reading		Senior High School		Higher Education	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Attention	8	4.2	164	13.1	102	12.5	70	11.1
Names	3	1.5	80	6.4	62	7.7	21	3.4
Feedback	71	37	215	17.2	179	21.9	107	17.0
Repetition	29	15.2	64	5.1	69	8.5	24	3.8
Elaboration	7	3.4	68	5.4	25	3.0	50	7.9
Organizing	11	5.8	79	6.3	51	6.3	39	6.2
Prediction	6	3.2	17	1.3	2	0.2	21	3.4
Relation to real life	11	5.7	85	6.8	39	4.7	57	9.0
Recalling	9	4.7	40	3.2	23	2.8	26	4.2
Clarification	5	2.6	193	15.4	125	15.4	73	11.7
Questions/name	26	13.6	185	14.8	110	13.5	101	16.0
Questions/clarification	2	1.0	37	2.9	16	1.9	23	3.7
Miscellaneous	4	2.1	25	2.1	13	1.6	16	2.6

Total	192	100	1252	100	816	100	628	100
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Table 3

Number and Percentage of Children's Extratextual Interactions in Terms of Approach and Children's Age

Extratextual Interaction	Approach				Age			
	Narration		Reading		2-3 years old		4-6 years old	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Names	59	26.8	255	28.6	162	41.1	152	21.2
Joint reading	45	20.5	62	7.0	24	6.0	83	11.6
Relation to real life	18	8.2	72	8.0	26	6.6	64	8.9
Prediction	18	8.2	65	7.3	28	7.1	55	7.7
Repetition	22	10.0	81	9.1	55	13.9	48	6.7
Recalling	7	3.2	26	2.9	6	1.5	27	3.8
Clarification	17	7.7	62	7.0	11	2.8	68	9.5
Questions/name	4	1.8	88	9.9	24	6.0	68	9.5
Questions/clarification	14	6.4	126	14.2	33	8.8	107	15.0
Miscellaneous	16	7.2	53	6.0	25	6.2	44	6.2
Total	220	100	890	100	394	100	716	100

Mean comparison per category of extratextual interaction indicates that the number of extratextual interactions by adults was greater during story reading than narration, with regard to the following categories: *names* ($t = -4.56, p < 0.05$); *questions about names* ($t = -2.26, p < 0.05$); *questions for clarification* ($t = -2.34, p < 0.05$); *relating stories to real life* ($t = -2.22, p < 0.05$); *sentence elaboration* ($t = -2.85, p < 0.05$); *drawing children's attention* ($t = -5.44, p < 0.05$); and *organizing the activity* ($t = -3.09, p < 0.05$) (Table 4).

Table 4

Means and Standard Variation of Children's and Adults' Extratextual Interactions in Terms of Approach

	Narration	Reading
	Means ± SD	Means ± SD
Children's Extratextual Interaction		
Names	2.458 ± 4.690	3.984 ± 5.156
Joint reading	1.875 ± 3.026	0.968 ± 1.952
Relation to real life	0.750 ± 0.989	1.125 ± 1.864
Prediction	0.750 ± 1.567	1.015 ± 1.964
Repetition	0.916 ± 1.442	1.265 ± 2.318
Recalling	0.291 ± 1.083	0.406 ± 1.244
Clarification	0.708 ± 1.197	0.968 ± 1.532
Questions/name*	0.166 ± 0.482	1.375 ± 2.278
Questions/clarification*	0.583 ± 0.974	1.968 ± 3.157
Adults' Extratextual Interaction		
Attention*	0.333 ± 1.090	2.562 ± 2.754
Names*	0.125 ± 0.338	1.250 ± 1.894

Feedback	2.958 ± 3.701	3.359 ± 3.666
Repetition	1.208 ± 1.668	1.000 ± 1.623
Elaboration*	0.291 ± 0.751	1.062 ± 1.781
Organizing*	0.458 ± 0.833	1.234 ± 1.477
Prediction	0.250 ± 0.897	0.265 ± 1.116
Relation to real life*	0.458 ± 0.833	1.328 ± 2.829
Recalling	0.375 ± 1.345	0.625 ± 1.676
Clarification*	0.208 ± 0.415	3.015 ± 3.094
Questions/name*	1.083 ± 2.717	2.890 ± 4.623
Questions/clarification*	0.083 ± 0.408	0.578 ± 1.551

* $p < 0.05$.

The number of children's extratextual interactions was greater during story reading with regard to the following categories: *questions about names* ($t = -4.01, p < 0.05$) and *questions for clarification* ($t = -3.14, p < 0.05$).

Mean comparison per extratextual interaction category for adults of various educational levels demonstrated that the number of extratextual interactions among adults with higher education was greater than that of adults with less education with regard to the following categories: *relating stories to real life* ($t = -2.63, p < 0.05$); *prediction* ($t = -2.20, p < 0.05$); *sentence elaboration* ($t = -3.31, p < 0.05$); *drawing children's attention* ($t = -2.16, p < 0.05$); and *organizing the activity* ($t = -2.60, p < 0.05$) (Table 5).

Table 5

Means and Standard Variation of Adults' Extratextual Interactions in Terms of Education

Extratextual Interaction	Senior High School	Higher Education
	Means± SD	Means± SD
Attention*	1.593± 2.408	2.916± 2.918
Names	0.968± 1.902	0.875± 0.992
Feedback	2.796± 3.551	4.458± 3.741
Repetition	1.078± 1.556	1.000± 1.842
Elaboration*	0.390± 0.726	2.083± 2.466
Organizing*	0.796± 1.250	1.625± 1.527
Prediction*	0.031± 0.250	0.875± 1.872
Relation to real life*	0.609± 2.060	2.375± 3.033
Recalling	0.359± 1.187	1.083± 2.302
Clarification	1.953± 2.930	3.041± 2.820
Questions/name*	1.718± 3.614	4.208± 5.283
Questions/clarification	0.250± 0.617	0.958± 2.349

* $p < 0.05$.

Mean comparison per extratextual interaction category among younger and older children demonstrated that children up to 3 years old made more extratextual comments than older children with regard to *names* ($t = 2.032, p < 0.05$). Older children made more extratextual comments than younger ones for the category *questions for clarification* ($t = -3.198, p < 0.05$), whereas adults made more extratextual comments when they read/narrated to older children for the category *clarification* ($t = -2.385, p < 0.05$).

Discussion

In Western societies, narration and reading are two approaches through which young children with the help of adults become familiar with their heritage and learn their native language (Teale, 1984). Despite some similarities, the two approaches differ in significant ways:

- *Material origin.* Reading is based only on written texts, whereas narration exploits sources from both oral texts and anonymous writing.
- *Memory.* Although essential to the narrator, who must have a priori knowledge of the story, memory is insignificant for the reader.
- *Visual contact with the audience.* Although constant for the narrator, visual contact is limited for the reader because there is always a book between a reader and his or her audience.
- *Story dramatization.* For narrators, story dramatization is easier than for readers because narrators tell the story as a personal experience with their own judgment and interpretation, whereas readers are committed to the written text (Giannikopoulou, 1996).

In Greece, both approaches are employed for storytelling to preschool children. Narration is mostly used by adults at a lower educational level for folktales, perhaps because folklore is still vivid among people of a lower social status (Natsiopoulou, 2002). In contrast, reading stories is preferred by adults at a higher educational level, possibly because of their familiarity with children's books (Natsiopoulou, 2002), including folktales.

Both during narration and reading, there are verbal exchanges between adults and children, which in the present study were made exclusively about the content of the story. Extratextual interaction about writing styles (i.e., naming letters, highlighting words or sentences) was not observed. Adults' focus on the content of the story has been observed in other studies as well (Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; Neuman, 1996; Morrow & Smith, 1990). In the present study, extratextual interaction about writing styles did not occur because the texts used did not invite that kind of extratextual interaction; it has often been noted that adults' extratextual interaction about writing is observed when they read alphabet books (Stadler & McEvoy, 2003; van Kleeck, 1998). van Kleeck (1998) maintains that when parents read to preschool children, first they emphasize the story, irrespective of its type (simple story, poetry, story with emphasis on the alphabet). They subsequently, in the case of storybooks, emphasize the plot; in the case of alphabet books, they make comments about the alphabet, morphemes at the beginning of words, etc. It is worth noting that alphabet books are common in Greece but were not chosen by participants in the present study. A possible explanation is that parents who had been asked to tell their children stories made their choice only among simple stories with pleasant plots and action in order to be able to motivate discussion about story content (Stadler & McEvoy, 2003).

The quantity and quality of verbal exchanges between adults and children during storytelling were affected by the approach employed (narration vs. reading) and the educational level of the adults. It was initially observed that reading stories resulted in more verbal exchanges between adults and children than narrating stories. The comparison of means indicated that during reading, adults' extratextual interaction was more frequent than during narration in terms of both high-level abstraction (i.e., relation of the story to real life, elaborated sentences) and low-level abstraction and concrete thought (i.e., inducing children to focus on pictures, names of objects, and incidents). In the present study, the narration approach was chosen principally by parents with less education. Torr (2004) found that parents who left school at an early age read stories quietly to children and interacted occasionally with them. In the present study, the small number of extratextual interactions during narration could be partly attributed to the adults' storytelling technique.

Verbal interaction between adults and children appears to be frequent during reading when children's interaction is motivated by pictures in a storybook. Yaden, Smolkin, and Conlon

(1989) maintained that 50%-60% of the questions asked by preschool children during storytelling at home involved characters and incidents in illustrations. In the present study, it was discovered that during reading, children's extratextual interaction was considerably more frequent than during narration with regard to the categories *questions about names of objects and incidents* and *questions for clarification about pictures and attitudes*. Thus, there was a greater number of adults' extratextual interactions during reading for the categories *names* ($t = -4.56, p < 0.05$) and *clarification* ($t = -7.09, p < 0.05$); there was a positive correlation between children's *questions about names* and adults' extratextual interaction for the category *names* ($r = 0.736, p < 0.01$) and children's *questions about clarification* and adults' extratextual interaction for the category *clarification* ($r = 0.505, p < 0.01$). The specific correlation between extratextual interaction categories that are considered to be low-level abstraction by researchers demonstrates that during reading, illustrations enhance verbal interaction between adults and children, principally in terms of the verbal exchanges requiring concrete thought.

The educational level of the narrator or reader was discovered to be related to adults' extratextual interaction, both in terms of high- and low-level abstraction. The narrators or readers of a higher educational level made more high-level abstraction extratextual comments than narrators or readers of a lower educational level. In addition, narrators or readers of a higher educational level challenged children to be involved in the narration or reading more than narrators or readers of a lower educational level. Thus, they made more prompts and asked more questions about specific and easily perceived objects to make children be involved in the narration or reading—for example, examining pictures or naming objects that they had already named before, as indicated in the following extract read from the folktale "The Wolf and the Seven Kids":

Once upon a time, a wolf, whose name was Greedy, wanted to devour the seven kids, who lived with their mother in a cottage in the woods.

Mother (looking at the picture): Can you see the wolf?

Child: Yes.

Then one day there was the right moment! Mother Goat was going out shopping.

Mother: Where is Mother Goat? Where is she going?

Child: Shopping.

Sometimes adults and children were engaged in a more essential conversation that contributed to (1) justifying attitudes, (2) providing information, (3) relating the story to the children's daily lives.

Justifying Attitudes (narrated extract from the folktale "The Wolf and the Seven Kids")

...the kid is running, getting a pair of scissors, and also the big needle and thread.

Child: The kid went and fetched them before you can say Jack Robinson.

Narrator: Well done, Elias! Just before you can say Jack Robinson! The kid ran so fast so that they could do their job, before the wolf wakes up.

Providing Information (narrated extract from the folktale "The Three Little Pigs")

...one of the little pigs built a house of wood.

Child: Where did he find the wood?

Narrator: He found it in the woods.

Child: What about the logs?

Narrator: He cut down trees in the woods.

Child: With the machine?

Narrator: Yes, with the machine.

Another little pig built a house of reeds.

Narrator: Do you know where he found the reeds?

Child: Where?

Narrator: In the lake.

Child: Are there any reeds in the lake?

Narrator: Yes, there are reeds in the lake.

Relating the Story to the Children's Daily Lives (extract read from the story "Mister Smart")

...and apart from everything else it also showed the time, the weather, and could sing happily.

Child: I would like to have an alarm clock like that, but it's impossible.

Narrator: Why is it impossible?

Child: It is, because I haven't got one, because I live in Hortiatis.

Narrator: Why do you live in Hortiatis and not in Smartville?

Research has suggested that the use of abstract concepts during reading promotes a child's linguistic development (Leseman & de Jong, 1998); therefore, many parent training programs teach reading approaches that combine frequent verbal exchanges between adults and children on the basis of questions such as "why" and "how" in addition to elaboration of children's phrases and other high-level abstraction extratextual interaction (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994).

In the present study, we found that such extratextual interactions during storytelling to children were more common among parents with a higher education; however, of the total number of extratextual interactions, only a small percentage could be categorized as high-level abstraction (Table 2). Categories that were described as low-level abstraction and concrete thought (feedback to children, questions about names, drawing children's attention, clarification) constituted the highest percentage of adults' extratextual interaction, regardless of the approach employed by the adults and their educational background.

These results suggest that Greek families treat narration and story reading to children as a child-centered activity, principally aimed at entertaining children. Specifically, the study suggests that the fundamental purpose of using children's books with preschool children is to challenge them aesthetically (Glazer, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1991), thus contributing to their love of reading. Whether the storytelling by Greek parents observed in this study contributed to their children's literacy development is difficult to determine, given that the majority of verbal exchanges between adults and children during story narrating and reading was of low-level abstraction and involved items that are used for communication between adults and children on other occasions besides storytelling.

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Appendix Texts Employed

Narration

- Little Red Riding Hood: 9 instances
- The Wolf and the Seven Kids: 5 instances
- The Three Little Pigs: 4 instances
- Hansel and Gretel: 1 instance
- Sleeping Beauty: 1 instance
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: 1 instance
- Improvisations: 3 instances

Readings

- Little Red Riding Hood: 6 instances
- The Wolf and the Seven Kids: 3 instances
- The Three Little Pigs: 5 instances
- Hansel and Gretel: 3 instances
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: 2 instances
- Cinderella: 2 instances
- Beauty and the Beast: 2 instances
- The Tin Soldier: 3 instances
- Sleeping Beauty
- Rapunzel
- Mrs. Kind
- The Magic Flute
- Puss in Boots
- Pinocchio
- Rosy and Snowy
- The Nutcracker
- 6 Aesop's tales

- 24 short stories