

Exploring Critical Multimodal Literacy in Reconstructing Fairy Tales¹

Tolga KARGIN²

Uşak University

Abstract

This study delves into the realm of critical multimodal literacy through the lens of fairy tale reconstruction. Employing an innovative pedagogical approach, the research examines how students engage with and transform traditional narratives using a critical perspective and digital tools. This action research showcases how students collaboratively reconstructed fairy tales by reshaping characters, plotlines, and themes, with a particular emphasis on gender roles and empowerment. The integration of digital platforms facilitated the transformation, allowing for creative exploration of characters, settings, and emotions. Findings reveal that students exhibited nuanced critical insights as they questioned and reshaped traditional gender representations, power dynamics, and narrative structures. This research contributes to educational practices by highlighting the potential of critical multimodal literacy activities in fostering transformative learning experiences. By integrating critical analysis with digital storytelling, this study opens avenues for advancing pedagogical strategies that promote critical engagement, multimodal expression, and societal reflection.

Keywords: Critical Multimodal Literacy, Elementary School, Fairy Tales, Digital Storytelling

DOI: 10.29329/epasr.2023.600.8

Submitted: 02 February 2023

Accepted: 17 July 2023

Published: 30 September 2023

¹Preliminary findings of this study were presented at the 18. *International Primary Teacher Education Symposium* in Antalya and *Re-conceptualizing Early Childhood Literacies: An International Conference* in Manchester, UK in 2019.

²Asst. Prof. Dr., Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Uşak University, Uşak, Türkiye, ORCID: 0000-0003-2380-2383, e-mail: tolga.kargin@usak.edu.tr

Introduction

İnci: I don't understand why grandma is hiding in her wardrobe and leaving Little Red Riding Hood alone with the wolf.

Author: Yes, that's a good question.

Fatma: Because grandmother is an old and sick woman.

İnci: Yes, but she could have been braver. After all, she is her granddaughter.

Yağız: Little Red Riding Hood is also forgetful. She does not listen to her mother's words and talks to the wolf.

İnci – Fatma: Yea ...

Sevgi: Yes, why are women always weak and men strong?

İnci: I agree. Why the hunter is not a woman, for example? There are also women hunters, for example our neighbor.

(A snippet from a whole class discussion while reading Little Red Riding Hood with a critical lens.)

Fairy tales serve as bedtime stories for some children and classroom reading material for many others. Often perceived as innocent narratives (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2018), they are shared with children by parents, caregivers, and educators without much scrutiny. However, beneath their seemingly harmless exteriors, these tales may harbor subtle complexities. Notably, gender stereotypes and power imbalances are prevalent in fairy tales, potentially perpetuating ingrained biases (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2014). Reflect upon iconic tales such as Cinderella, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, among others. A common thread emerges - the female characters in these classic tales are often portrayed as vulnerable and reliant on the assistance of male figures like princes, hunters, or fairy godmothers. They appear passive, waiting to be rescued or dependent on male care.

Given the premise that the texts encountered during early childhood influence children's comprehension of the world and their forthcoming identities (Richardson and Eccles, 2007), the habitual consumption of male-dominated narratives raises concerns about its potential impact on girls' self-confidence and boys' perceptions. Hence, instilling in children the ability to critically analyze texts becomes essential to unveil hidden power dynamics and gender stereotypes (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2014). Early education should encourage questioning the narratives they encounter, empowering them to identify and discuss unjust power dynamics and gender biases woven into these texts.

The presented anecdote takes place within Fatma's third-grade classroom (all names are pseudonyms), where students engaged with fairy tales through a critical lens for the first time. Analyzing Little Red Riding Hood using this approach sparked significant inquiries among the

children, leading to broader conversations on gender stereotypes and power structures embedded in traditional fairy tales.

In Türkiye, adhering to national curricula and prescribed textbooks is imperative for educators. The densely packed curriculum often leaves teachers with limited time to introduce additional topics. Drawing from personal experience as a former teacher, educator, and researcher, I interacted with various schools in Türkiye's Aegean Region, collaborating with both students and teachers. Among them was Fatma, who expressed concerns about a national curriculum that falls short of fostering critical thinking in children. Fatma embodies the educators who strive to impart meaningful lessons to students beyond mere test preparation. After deliberating on her concerns, I proposed a collaborative effort to develop a student-centered unit that amalgamates two pivotal approaches beneficial for children's future: critical literacy, nurturing their critical thinking skills, and multimodal literacy, providing a platform for creative expression through multiple modes.

After obtaining approval from the school district, I shared the project's intricacies with Fatma and worked closely with her students. These students hailed from diverse backgrounds, spanning a range of literacy levels. Over five weeks, with two sessions per week, I conducted classes in Fatma's classroom, adopting an action research approach. The study aimed to enhance children's critical thinking abilities through the framework of critical multimodal literacy (Ajayi, 2015). Guided by an action plan, students participated in various activities that encouraged them to adopt a critical perspective. Upon completion, students were tasked with transforming several fairy tales into more equitable narratives on digital platforms. Throughout the study, multiple cameras documented mini lessons, classroom discussions, student engagements, and sharing sessions. Additionally, field notes were taken, and the digital stories created by the students were recorded on iPads, contributing to the collected data.

Critical Multimodal Literacy

The concept of critical multimodal literacy synergizes two significant theories: critical literacy and multimodality. While critical literacy urges us to scrutinize texts through a critical lens, with a focus on power dynamics and potential social injustices (Freire, 1970; Gee, 2015; Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012), it traditionally hinges on print-based materials. Conversely, critical multimodal literacy expands upon the foundation of critical literacy by underscoring the value of incorporating diverse modes—such as sounds, speech, movement, postures, and gestures—into the process of constructing meaning (Ajayi, 2015; Cappello, Wiseman, & Turner, 2019). In this research, the critical multimodal literacy approach guided students as they analyzed classical fairy tales from a critical perspective and subsequently reimaged these narratives using the PuppetPals digital puppetry app. PuppetPals enabled students to manipulate cut-out characters within a virtual setting while narrating their revised tales.

In contemporary times, young children have increasingly immersed themselves in digital platforms for various purposes (Ofcom, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2020; Rideout & Robb, 2019), and they encountered in several different types of texts in their daily lives. The theory of multimodal literacies posits that individuals employ an array of modes in their communicative interactions and literacy engagements (Kress, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Making sense of digital texts necessitates a repertoire of modes extending beyond the traditional realm of printed material. Consequently, the theory of multimodal literacies has gained prominence, particularly in studies concerning digital literacies (Boivin, 2021; Kuby & Vaughn, 2015; Mills, 2009; Oakley, Wildy, & Berman, 2020; Wessel-Powel, Kargin, & Wohlwend, 2009). This paradigm underscores the modes employed during the consumption and production of digital texts, encompassing speech, voice modulation (including tone and volume), sound effects, background music, images, gestures, posture, gaze, movement, and more (Kress, 2009).

The Application of Critical Multimodal Literacy

In the present study, the students under Fatma's guidance embarked on an assortment of activities designed to unveil latent messages within texts—ranging from power dynamics to gender stereotypes—by harnessing a myriad of modes. Initially, they acquired skills in text analysis by examining a birthday invitation card through a simplified iteration of Gee's discourse analysis strategies (1999), discerning how text design, colors, images, and verbiage collectively contributed to meaning. Subsequently, they engaged in a critical reading of traditional fairy tales, sensitizing themselves to gender inequities pervasive in these narratives. Finally, they recreated these fairy tales as animated stories on iPad tablets, employing the critical multimodal literacy framework as a response to the inquiry: "How might these fairy tales be transformed into more equitable stories?"

Exploring Multimodal Text Analysis

As an integral facet of this study, students embarked on an exercise in text analysis, specifically involving the examination of a birthday invitation card. Employing a simplified rendition of Gee's discourse analysis strategies (1999), participants delved into the intricate interplay of text design, colors, images, and language in shaping meaning. This exploration was grounded in inquiries designed to unveil the card's contextualized meanings, embedded social languages, and underlying cultural models.



Figure 1. Birthday invitation card¹

Borrowing and adapting from Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2014, p.195), the following questions guided students' investigation:

- What are the key words, and how do they contribute to the card's meaning? (situated meaning)
- How do the figures, colors, and fonts influence the card's meaning? (situated meaning)
- Whose language is reflected in this text? Is it akin to language used by older siblings? (social languages)
- In what situations might people use such language? (social languages)
- What assumptions must one hold for this card to make sense? (cultural models)
- Which cultural symbols bear significance in conveying the card's meaning? (cultural models)

These queries catalyzed profound discussions within Fatma's classroom. When prompted about attending a birthday party depicted on the card, a gendered divide surfaced, with girls largely affirming their attendance, and boys often expressing reservations. Exploring the types of invitation cards preferred by boys further spurred conversations about gender disparities in communication, the choice of colors and imagery in text preparation, and even preferences for leisure activities. Subsequently, this discourse evolved into a critical examination of the necessity and rationale behind such gender-driven distinctions, fostering an exploration of the implications therein.

Participating in these activities illuminated for the students that texts encompass a tapestry of signs contributing to meaning construction. Crafting a text extends beyond word selection, encompassing colors, fonts, figures, and the alignment with the social language of a designated cultural group. The act of communication involves conveying messages rooted in one's beliefs about

¹ English translation of the text can be read as "On my birthday, we laugh a lot and become even more beautiful as we laugh. We dress up nicely, adorn ourselves, and have plenty of fun. On a wonderful day, I'm throwing a dazzling party. I'm also inviting you to my 9th birthday party."

the recipient's culture (e.g., associating young girls with dressing up and applying makeup) (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2014).

Unveiling Gender Roles in Fairy Tales

Gender stereotypes persist across societies, shaped in part by the influence of popular culture (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Present-day discourse advocates for gender equity across various spheres of life, catalyzing shifts in societal roles (Janssen et al., 2017). This transformation has implications even for the depiction of gender within traditional fairy tales. To foster students' critical literacy, we undertook an activity with Fatma's students, prompting them to explore gender stereotypes within classic fairy tales.

During recess, students posed specific questions to various adults (teachers, school administrators, security guards, cleaners), extracting immediate associations tied to iconic characters:

- What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Cinderella?
- What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of the prince in the Cinderella tale?
- What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Little Red Riding Hood?
- What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of the grandmother of Little Red Riding Hood?
- What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of the hunter in the Little Red Riding Hood tale?

Consequently, students shared their findings in a subsequent lesson. This exercise underscored contrasting personality traits attributed to male and female characters within the same tale, provoking a critical analysis of the answers provided by adults (see Table 1).

Table 1. Fairy-tale characters and their first-to-mind characteristics

Cinderella	Prince in Cinderella	Little Red Riding Hood	Little Red Riding Hood's Grandmother	The Hunter in Little Red Riding Hood
Beautiful	Rich	Optimistic	Elderly	Brave
Good hearted	Handsome	Responsive	Sick	Powerful
Innocent	Stubborn	Naive	Coward	Protective
Orphan	Researcher	Good hearted	Poor	Helpful
Poor	Good hearted	Full of love	In need of care	Good Hearted
	Brave			Honest

Examining the table, it becomes evident that female characters are frequently portrayed as powerless, easily deceived, awaiting rescue, or are often reduced to notions of physical beauty as a purportedly positive trait. In contrast, male characters bear attributes such as wealth, handsomeness, bravery, resilience, and even investigative prowess. These traits, when juxtaposed with gendered roles of today's world, prompted in-depth discussions among students. The acceptability of these portrayals

was scrutinized, fostering a collective evaluation akin to the vignette introduced at the outset of this article.

Critical Reading: A Step-by-Step Examination of Fairy Tales

With foundational understanding garnered from the initial activities, the subsequent phase unfolded - a meticulous dissection of fairy tales, aligning with Lewison, Leland, and Harste's method (2014). Grouped into small clusters, students were equipped with identical storybooks, generous sheets of drawing paper, and an assortment of markers. The process commenced with me narrating the chosen fairy tale, while students followed along within their groups. Upon introduction of the primary character, the narrative paused, granting students the opportunity to illustrate the character at the center of their drawing paper. Resuming the tale, students were then prompted to discern noteworthy character traits and aspects warranting critique. These observations were transcribed on the paper akin to graffiti, deliberately disregarding orthographic norms and punctuation. This approach aimed to foster unfiltered expression in alignment with the tenets of critical literacy, thereby fostering an environment free from inhibitions. This mode of engagement emboldened students who may have hesitated to voice their opinions or who may have felt uncomfortable due to perceived writing inadequacies. The students wholeheartedly embraced this activity, resulting in unreserved articulation of their perspectives on paper. Moreover, students collectively brainstormed alternative renditions of these tales, aiming to enhance their fairness.

In the ensuing session, students reconvened in their groups, each group assigned a distinct classic tale for a similar exercise. Designating a narrator within the group, others followed along, recording character attributes and critical observations with graffiti-style annotations (See Figure 2).

Upon conclusion of this process across all groups, students were encouraged to share their character analyses, fostering a discussion regarding the equilibrium of power among characters. Their reflections on elements subject to critique within the tales were also sought.



Figure 2. Fairy tale analysis activity in the form of graffiti

Invoking critical thinking, students were challenged to envision a role reversal wherein all characters of a tale were of the opposite gender compared to the original narrative. For instance, students were asked to reimagine Little Red Riding Hood as the "Boy in the Blue Hat." In this reinterpretation, the Boy in the Blue Hat, bearing a cup of soup prepared by his father, tended to his ailing grandfather, and later found rescue from the wolf at the hands of a female hunter. This exercise generated amusement, yet elicited discomfort among male students. Subsequently, it provided a platform for revisiting discussions surrounding character attributes and the interplay of power dynamics between genders.

Critical Writing: Crafting Narratives with a Critical Lens

Following the immersive analysis of fairy tales through a critical prism, students were once again prompted with the question, "How might this tale be reimaged for the better?" This exercise entailed collaborative creation of new narrative texts, guided by the principles of critical writing. Commencing with an elucidation of core fairy tale elements at an accessible level, students were introduced to the basic requisites of a tale, encompassing diverse characters, a plot or event, as well as the essential components of place and time. Armed with this foundational understanding, students transcribed their envisioned fairy tale scenarios on paper—a precursor to their later digital adaptations (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Fairy tale text creation activity

Some students decided to keep tale characters from the original narrative with some modifications, and some others preferred to bring their characters from alternate tales. Within their respective groups, participants assumed roles encompassing at least one fairy tale character, subsequently collaboratively overhauling and documenting the newly envisioned narrative.

Transformative Shifts in Critically Rewritten Tales

Upon scrutinizing the students' critically reimaged fairy tales, discernible reflections of the extensive dialogues on power disparities—both within character dynamics and across genders—became apparent. Many foundational character attributes underwent transformation, aligning with

students' critical perspectives. Moreover, modifications were made to elements previously subjected to critique within the narrative structures.

For instance, consider the students' reinterpretation of the Cinderella tale:

Storyteller: Once upon a time, in a village, lived a girl named Cinderella. She shared her home with her mother and two step-siblings. One day, an unexpected letter arrived, bearing news of a royal math competition that all children were obliged to attend.

Mother: My beloved children, gather around.

Step-Sisters: Here we are, Mother.

Mother: A math competition is to take place in the kingdom.

Cinderella: When, Mother?

Mother: Tomorrow, at noon, my dears.

Step-Sisters: Let's prepare our attire, Mother.

Mother: Remember, only the girls who answer all questions will be deemed suitable matches for princes.

Next day...

Mother: Are you prepared, my daughters?

Cinderella: Ready, Mother, we're on our way.

Narrator: The girls arrive at the kingdom, and conquere every math question thrown their way.

Princes: Father, we wish to wed these accomplished young ladies.

King: You cannot marry individuals of humble origin.

Princes: Very well, Father.

Storyteller: The princes, unperturbed, approach the girls in the garden and disclose their predicament. Eventually, they return to the king, persuading him to reconsider. The outcome—a joyous wedding celebration. The couples, united, bask in happiness.

In the initial phase of the analysis, the newly crafted script of the tale was examined to ascertain whether the narrative encompasses the essential elements of a tale and is composed with a critical perspective in mind (see Table 2).

Table 2. Cinderella fairy tale script analysis

Evaluation of the Preparation Process of the Digital Tale	Multimodal Analysis Element Used	Critical Aspects of Output and Outcome
Transcribing a fairy tale script <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Including different characters and a narrator ✓ ● The event or plot is clear and understandable ✓ ● Including elements of time and space ✓ ● Creating a fluent text by considering the introduction, development and conclusion parts ✓ 	Text Analysis	- The stepmother and stepsisters are good characters. - Women stand out not for their beauty but for their success. - Not only Cinderella but also her siblings were rewarded at the end of the story.

Upon perusal, it becomes evident that the newly formulated narrative introduces distinct characters and storytellers. Notably, the plot undergoes a transformation, culminating in a lucid and coherent sequence of events. The narrative journey commences within Cinderella's dwelling, transitions to the royal palace, and integrates the element of time by situating the competition on the subsequent day. Seamlessly flowing, the text employs a narrative introduction, dialogues within the climactic conflict, and the storyteller's resolution, thus encompassing all expected components. Scrutinizing the critical aspects of this narrative, one observes the deliberate alterations to characters and plot dynamics, thereby fostering a critical engagement with the content.

In our meticulous deconstruction of the ingeniously reimagined fairy tale narratives, conspicuous shifts in character traits take center stage. The maternal figure now unifies her offspring through inclusive addresses, eradicating the division between Cinderella and her stepsiblings. This unification is exemplified by the shared announcement of the imminent royal contest. The storyteller deftly portrays Cinderella's stepsiblings as sources of goodwill, signaling a harmonious rapport. Notably, the vilified stepmother and stepsiblings undergo a remarkable transformation, evolving into benevolent characters. A pivotal recalibration centers on character attributes, pivoting from superficial traits like beauty to the demonstration of prowess. In this rendition, all three siblings—Cinderella and her stepsisters—exhibit remarkable mathematical acumen, skillfully deviating from the conventional emphasis on physical appearance.

A closer inspection of the adapted storyline reveals a departure from the customary royal ball—a trope for selecting the most beautiful girl—toward a celebration of achievement. The narrative evolves into a union founded on merit, as the prince elects to wed the most accomplished candidate. This narrative shift is accentuated by the introduction of three princes instead of one, each choosing a partner based on aptitude rather than mere aesthetics. Consequently, not only Cinderella but also her stepsisters unite in matrimony with princes, surmounting the initial resistance of the king and culminating in a harmonious wedding celebration.

This critical reenvisioning of the narrative underscores the transformative potential latent within activities grounded in critical literacy. It becomes evident that students adroitly harnessed

insights from their critical explorations, inducing nuanced alterations in the narrative. However, astute analysis sheds light on lingering areas susceptible to critique. The denouement, where union with princes functions as a reward, underscores that despite commendable revisions, aspects warrant further scrutiny.

Digital Transformation of Critical Tales: A Multimodal Analysis

Digital tales, infused with a critical perspective, and videos detailing the process of their creation were examined using the Dedoose data analysis software (see Figure 4). The fundamental findings yielded by this multimodal analysis can be distilled as follows: Tales forged in the digital realm are imbued with greater detail than their pencil-and-paper counterparts. Varied tonalities and interactive visuals amplify the tales' significance, surpassing the depth conveyed by scripted texts. In comparative analysis of the resultant digital tales, it emerged that the improvisations infused within digital tales engendered much richer content, even as the primary narrative trajectory remained intact.



Figure 4. Multimodal analysis in Dedoose data analysis software

The preparatory process for the digital fairy tales entailed students penning a script with paper and pencil, guided by their critical perspective. Subsequently, the digital fairy tale's creation unfolded by crafting characters and background imagery via the PuppetPals iPad application. As a collective endeavor, the group transformed the narrative into a digital film within the PuppetPals iPad application. In this section, the analysis of the Cinderella fairy tale persists as an exemplar, further demonstrated by the formulated Multimodal Analysis Table (see Table 3).

Delving into the visuals employed within digital fairy tales, two distinct aspects emerged: fairy-tale characters and digital background imagery. As the tale unfurled, it was apparent that not only Cinderella but also her stepsiblings manifested in accordance with the script. Notably, the

students favored images portraying the stepsisters' amiable visage. The stepmother's depiction caught her summoning her daughters; though her countenance bore a touch of seriousness, no images from the original tale showcased her smiling. Delving into attire, the character's everyday patched garb was eschewed in favor of the attire she wore en route to the ball. This harmonization in attire with her siblings exhibited equality, eschewing hierarchical representation.

Table 3. Multimodal analysis of the Cinderella digital fairy tale

Evaluation of the Created Digital Tale	Multimodal Analysis Element Used	Critical Aspects of Output and Outcome
<p>Images used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of different visuals suitable for different characters in the fairy tale during movie creation ✓ ● Use of different backgrounds during movie creation in accordance with the setting of the fairy tale ✓ 	Visual Analysis	<p>Characters: In accordance with the created scenario, we see Cinderella and her sisters wearing similar clothes and smiling faces. The image of the mother shows her calling out to the girls.</p> <p>Background: A small hut was used for the house of Cinderella and her family. A castle image from the PuppetPals app was used for the royal castle and a woodland image from the app was used for the castle garden.</p>
<p>Sounds used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of different voices for fairy tale characters and storyteller (33 times) ✓ ● Adjusting the loudness of the voice according to the characters (3 times) ✓ ● Adjusting the tone and volume of voice to convey different emotions (6 times) ✓ 		Voice Analysis
<p>Movement of characters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moving, enlarging, minimizing, changing the direction of the characters on the screen in accordance with the event in the story (26 times) ✓ 	Motion Analysis	<p>The movements of the characters are realized in accordance with the fairy tale scenario, but a critical perspective cannot be evaluated under this heading.</p>
<p>Words used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Speaking according to the script (7 times) ✓ ● Improvisation (28 times) ✓ 	Speech Analytics	<p>During the transformation of the fairy tale into a digital fairy tale, it is seen that the content was enriched by improvising in most of the digital film, although the main lines of the script were adhered to. Although the script was not fully adhered to, the characteristic features attributed to the fairy tale characters and the critical aspect of the fairy tale were preserved in the improvised parts.</p>
<p>Film directing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Change the background when the time comes (18 times) ✓ ● Bringing characters on and off stage when the time is right (27 times) ✓ ● Ensuring movie smoothness by pausing recording when a scene ends and starting recording when a new scene begins (28 times) ✓ ● Giving instructions to the group members who will make vocalization between the scenes (20 times) ✓ 	Visual Analysis, Audio Analysis, Motion Analysis, Speech Analysis	<p>It was observed that one student took on the role of a movie director and, adhering to the script text in its main outlines, changed the background and the characters who would come on and off the stage, paused the recording when the scene was over, gave prompts to the other group members about the words to be spoken and directed his friends by restarting the recording for the new scene.</p>

Analyzing the chosen backgrounds, a small hut served as Cinderella's familial abode, initiating the story at this location. Subsequently, a castle visually portrayed the Royal Castle visited for the competition, while a woodland image from the PuppetPals application depicted the garden wherein dialogues between the characters and princes ensued. In circumventing the use of the original castle imagery in the original tale, typically associated with the ball, and opting for PuppetPals' available images, narrative coherence was effectively preserved. This alignment across character and background choices underscores the selection of visuals conducive to the fairy tale scenario, conscientiously rewritten with a critical perspective.

Examining the "Voices Used" segment of the analysis table underscores that the loudness of all characters' voices dynamically adapts according to their dialogue, ensuring smooth emotional transitions. The frequency code analysis (see Table 3) reveals that the tone of voice was altered 33 times during the digital tale preparation, deliberate loudness shifts occurred three times, and vocalization was deployed six times to convey emotion (e.g., a sad or excited tone). The adoption of a soft and affectionate tone for both the stepmother and stepsisters during their voicing resonates with the narrative's critical dimensions. Delving into character movement, the code frequency breakdown (see Table 3) indicates characters were moved 26 times within the digital tale, aligning with the fairy tale scenario and conversation directions. However, a critical perspective in character movement is not assessed under this category.

An in-depth analysis of character speeches and storyteller dialogues across the digital tale and comparison with the written scenario elucidates enriched content arising from improvisation within the digital platform. Impressively, the scripted lines were identical in only seven instances, with characters experiencing improvisation in 28 instances (see Table 3). This dynamic emphasizes that while the digital tale doesn't rigidly adhere to the script, the tale's characteristic attributes and critical nuances remain intact within the improvised segments.

The process of digital tale creation and its management was scrutinized through recorded sessions capturing group activities during the digital tale's preparation (see Figure 4). Although the final digital tale spans a mere 1 minute and 36 seconds, the production process itself required 31 minutes and 52 seconds. A designated student assumed the role of film director, overseeing proceedings. Post determining the character and background setup collaboratively, the group identified each scene's background and character requirements under the film director's guidance. With the initial scene set, the film director-initiated recording, assuming the storyteller's mantle. Subsequent segments saw halts in recording for scene setup adjustments and dialogue consultation, ensuring a cohesive digital narrative. This meticulous process, while time-consuming—converting 32 minutes of effort into 1 minute and 36 seconds of digital narrative—meticulously adhered to the story's scenario and critical essence.

As the Cinderella digital tale example showcases, critical narratives enriched by digital platforms gain depth and detail. The judicious use of visuals, voice modulations, tonalities, and improvisations preserves the narrative's critical dimensions while harnessing the potential of digital possibilities—such as sound and imagery—to convey the intended message to the reader or audience.

Discussion and Policy Implications

The presented study delved into the realm of critical literacy within the context of fairy tale narratives, examining how students' engagement with critical perspectives influences the reconstruction of traditional tales and their subsequent transformation into digital narratives. Through meticulous analysis and interpretation, this discussion section elucidates the implications and significance of the findings, the alignment with prior research, and the potential avenues for future exploration.

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential embedded within critical literacy activities. By encouraging students to critically analyze traditional fairy tales and subsequently reconstruct them, the pedagogical intervention not only reshapes narratives but also reshapes perceptions (Lewis, 2022). The process of questioning traditional gender roles, power dynamics, and stereotypical character attributes instills a nuanced understanding of narrative construction and its underlying ideologies (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2018). Furthermore, the engagement with critical perspectives stimulates creativity and empowers students to reconceptualize narratives in ways that challenge societal norms (Chiang, 2021).

One another significant outcome of this study revolves around the observation that narratives produced by students through digital mediums tend to exhibit a greater depth of detail when contrasted with the story scripts crafted using traditional paper and pencil. Notably, as these young learners transitioned their written narratives into digital storytelling, a discernible expansion in storyline length, coherence, and authenticity emerged, driven by their capacity to introduce improvised elements while maintaining fidelity to the central narrative framework. This finding aligns with prior studies within the literature (Mills, 2015).

Crucially, the transmutation of these revised narratives into digital tales showcases the multimodal dimensionality digital platforms can bring to storytelling. The integration of interactive visuals, varied tonalities, and improvisations amplifies the tales' emotional resonance and enriches their messages (Hull & Nelson, 2005). The implications extend beyond literary comprehension, embracing the convergence of critical thinking and technological fluency, thus fostering well-rounded digital literacy.

This study aligns with existing research highlighting the pedagogical value of critical literacy in enhancing students' comprehension of narratives and fostering critical thinking skills (Lewison,

Lelland, & Harste, 2014; Luke & Freebody, 1999). The reimagining of traditional tales through a critical lens echoes the sentiments of scholars who advocate for the use of narratives to instill social awareness and challenge established norms (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Moreover, the infusion of technology into the critical reconstruction process resonates with digital literacy studies emphasizing the potential of digital platforms to enrich storytelling experiences and communication (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

While this study illuminates the benefits of merging critical literacy and multimodal literacy, several avenues for future inquiry emerge. Delving deeper into the impact of students' critical reconstructions on their perspectives toward gender roles, power dynamics, and societal norms could offer valuable insights. Longitudinal studies tracking the sustained influence of critical literacy engagement on students' attitudes and behaviors may uncover lasting effects. Additionally, exploring the role of cultural context in shaping students' critiques and reconstructions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of narrative transformation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that engaging students in critical literacy activities and guiding them to reconstruct traditional narratives with a critical perspective can lead to transformative outcomes. The process not only challenges students' preconceived notions but also empowers them to reshape narratives that align with their values and perspectives. Moreover, the integration of digital platforms enriches these narratives, enhancing the storytelling experience and enabling the conveyance of more intricate messages. Through critical multimodal literacy framework, educators can equip students with the tools to become active participants in shaping narratives and understanding their underlying complexities. This study calls for continued exploration into the dynamic intersection of critical literacy, narrative reconstruction, and digital platforms, fostering a generation of critical thinkers and adept storytellers.

Conflict of Interest

There is no potential conflict of interest to declare.

Funding Details

This study was supported by the Uşak University Scientific Research Projects Division under Grant 2018/SOSB005.

Ethical Statement

This study was ethically approved by the Uşak University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, dated 11.05.2017 and numbered 2017-33.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Prof. Dr. Erol Duran and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sacide Güzin Mazman Akar for their contributions in putting together the Project proposal.

References

- Boivin, N. (2021). Co-participatory multimodal intergenerational storytelling: Preschool children's relationship with modality creating elder inclusion. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687984211012055>
- Bussey, K. and Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.106.4.676>
- Chiang, T. (2021). What freirean critical pedagogy says and overlooks from a durkheimian perspective. *Social Inclusion*, 9(4), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v9i4.4157>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2015). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Routledge.
- Hull, G. and Nelson, M. T. (2005). Locating the semiotic power of multimodality. *Written Communication*, 22(2), 224-261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088304274170>
- Janks, H. (2010). *Literacy and power*. Routledge.
- Janssen, I., Huijts, T., Stevens, G., Torsheim, T., & Vollebergh, W. (2017). The happiest kids on earth. gender equality and adolescent life satisfaction in Europe and North America. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(5), 1073-1085. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0756-7>
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). Sampling "the new" in new literacies. In C. Lankshear & M. Knobel (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 1-24). New York, NY: Peter Lang. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2008.00855_5.x
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2009). *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. Routledge.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Kuby, C. R., & Vaughn, M. (2015). Young children's identities becoming: Exploring agency in the creation of multimodal literacies. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 15(4), 433-472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798414566703>

- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2006). *New literacies: Changing knowledge and classroom learning*. (2nd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Leland, C. H., Lewison, M., & Harste, J. C. (2018). *Teaching children's literature: It's critical*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315269627>
- Lewis, B. (2022). How literacy resources contribute to a gender inclusive classroom. *Kairaranga*, 23(1), 35-49. <https://doi.org/10.54322/kairaranga.v23i1.274>
- Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79, 382-392.
- Lewison, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J.C. (2014). *Creating critical classrooms: Reading and writing with an Edge*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315817842>
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4-11.
- Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). A map of possible practices: Further notes on the four resources model. *Practically primary*, 4(2), 5-8.
- Mills, K. A. (2009). Multiliteracies: Interrogating competing discourses. *Language and Education*, 23(2), 103-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780802152762>
- Mills, K. A. (2015). *Literacy theories for the digital age*. Multilingual Matters.
- Oakley, G., Wildy, H., & Berman, Y. (2020). Multimodal digital text creation using tablets and open-ended creative apps to improve the literacy learning of children in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(4), 655–679. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1468798418779171>
- Ofcom (2022). Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2022. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2022>
- Pew Research Center (2020). *Parenting children in the age of screens*. Retrived on 29.11.2022, from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/childrens-engagement-with-digital-devices-screen-time/>
- Richardson, P. W., & Eccles, J. S. (2007). Rewards of reading: Toward the development of possible selves and identities. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46(6), 341-356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2007.06.002>
- Rideout, V., and Robb, M. B. (2019). *The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2019*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.

<https://www.common sense media.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens-2019>

Wessel-Powell, C., Kargin, T., & Wohlwend, K.E. (2016). Enriching and assessing young children's multimodal storytelling. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(2), 167-178.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1491>

Wohlwend, K. E. (2009). Early adopters: Playing new literacies and pretending new technologies in print-centric classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 9(2), 117-140.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798409105583>