

# Contents of Fairs as an Intermediary Resource in Psychotherapy of Children's Group: Experience Report<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**—Fairy tales populate the children's universe, being understood by psychology and education as an important instrument in the formation of the intellect of the human being, stimulating psychic and emotional development. The contributions of fairy tales in a situation of child group psychotherapy were investigated. Nine children, of both sexes, aged between 6 and 9 years, from the waiting list for psychological care at the UnirG School of Psychology Service participated in the study. The same was carried out on the premises of that school service. For data collection, interviews were conducted with parents and playful interviews with the child, as well as information from observation and free drawings, expressed during the therapy group. There were 12 sessions performed dynamically, using a different tale for each service. With each story, children manifested behavioral and psychic contents related to the tales that most identified themselves, reproducing their fantasies, traumas, and needs in dramatizations and drawings. Among the narrative resources used, those that most demonstrated awakening psychic contents in children were John and the Beans' Foot, Neve White and Ugly Duckling. The identifications with the stories mention the experiences brought by each child and that individual identifications with the stories are clear and direct demonstrating the relevance of the use of short stories as a valuable resource in psychological care.

**Keywords**—Infant group therapy, Behavior, Psychoanalysis.

## I. INTRODUCTION

From antiquity around the world fairy tales have been told to children for entertainment, however, such narrative features bring with them meanings that lead many children beyond fun, to contact fantasy, magic and the world of dreams, which represent reflection upon themselves, the encounter with the self.

Most kids grow up listening to fairy tales. These stories, filled with witches, princesses, and princes, give space, in adulthood, to other stories involving other heroes, who are on television, in newspapers, in various media [1].

In this sense, fiction means not only a form of fun but also a vehicle by which an imaginary model is established that serves to elaborate subjective aspects of being or its social reality, favorite stories end up being sources of inspiration and identification [2]. Through fairy tales children can make a connection of the fantasy world with the real world, thus enabling the understanding of

conflicts, the elaboration of the self, the formation of their identity. How the child goes to live all this happens in a natural way, allowing her to find alone the right time to see and recognize the real world and realize that fantasy will not remain there forever [3].

According to several authors [3, 4], fairy tales are a necessary instrument for the formation of the intellect of the human being and, without a doubt, it is one of the ways that most influence psychological, intellectual and spiritual development and growth, having the function of awakening the imagination and broaden the worldview surrounding the individual.

In fairy tales, fantasies, supernatural gifts, mages characters, witches, ogres, princes, princesses, kings, ordinary people and magical objects that are part of the plots are employed. Its characteristic is the existence of good and evil in a simple way, enabling children to better understand the essence of history [5]. In these, they

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express their fears and fears, such as separation, weaning, independence, among many others, is the death of the parents, a recurring theme in the short stories and that awakens the most varied fantasies and childish emotions [6].

[3], believes that fairy tales serve in the clinic to encourage children, young people and adults to overcome overcoming their instinctive nature, strengthening the ego, so that they become increasingly aware of ethical choices in their condition and personal conduct; moreover, in the case of adults, they can help identify their complexes and their compulsions, by "more or less rapid" analogies, as well as archetypal forms, provide clues for understanding the processes that take place in the collective psyche.

With the look focused on the psychological clinic, [7] considers the fairy tale as a possibility of intervention, because this resource assists in the therapist's approach to the child, as well as in the communication between parents and children.

In this sense, group therapy mediated by short stories favors the mental balance of each participant, in which through the group relationship children bring thoughts and emotions of conflict, and may cause experienced difficulties similar to theirs, that is, his fears, anxieties and his fantasies [8, 9].

Working with children in vulnerable situations, [10] observed that at the beginning of the narratives, children were already able to express their feelings through speech and that projections and identifications were also emerging regarding the characters.

The use of fairy tales helps and facilitates the communication of psychotherapist about the psychotherapy process, as well as contributes to the strengthening of bonding, and during the therapeutic process, one can work with the issues brought by the child to form the symbolic elements used by it as means of elaborating its conflicts through narrative. Moreover, the affective bond established by the child with the narrator provides a transformative effect of fantasies [9–11]. When telling a story, it is necessary to give time for the child to think, reflect and feel how the narrated elements relate to their world so that the fairy tale acts on his psyche [3].

Even though we are aware that the tales instruct the imaginary and establish a link with the internal conflicts of the child, this understanding still remains in the field of theories and there is limited material directed to its use in child psychotherapy [9, 10].

In view of the above, this article presents research in

which the contributions of fairy tales in a situation of child group psychotherapy were investigated.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is inserted in the project Contributions of fairy tales in child group psychotherapy, already approved by the Research Ethics Committee, with CAAE 53007015.4.0000.5518. The sample of this study consisted of 9 children and their parents and or guardians from spontaneous demand from the psychology service of a school clinic. Thus, qualitative research was conducted, using the Multiple Case Study design [12].

This sample occurred for convenience, with no need for a control group because it was a qualitative analysis. The inclusion criterion of children was not to be in individual psychotherapy, being between 6 years and 9 years and 11 months, to be allowed to participate in the study. The sample size goes against that suggested by [6]. For the author, in the work with a group of children and fairy tales, the ideal number of members oscillates between five and ten participants, and a large group could create difficulties in management, dispersion in parallel conversations and agitation.

Initially, those responsible for the child were contacted and the objectives of the research were presented, being consulted about whether to participate, signing a free and informed consent form if they agreed.

After consultation with those responsible, anamnesis interviews were conducted with them, and playful interviews using free play as a resource [13] with the child, as well as the application of the Projective Test House – Tree – Person, HTP [14].

After completing the individual evaluations, the children began care in child group psychotherapy, mediated by fairy tales between April and October 2016, totaling 12 meetings. In the end, new evaluations and returns were performed for both children, finding expectations and understanding of their journey and evolution during the year.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below, a brief synthesis of the nine cases seen in the group (Table 1) is presented. It emphasized that, in order to protect the identity of the participants, following the ethical principles involving secrecy in research with human beings, the initials were used, for children, followed by a numeral, therefore, C1, C2 and so on.

Table 1 - Synthesis of clinical cases composing the group

| SUBJECT | INITIAL EVALUATION   |
|---------|--|
| C1      | Female child, 6 years old and school. The reason for referral for psychological care was the complaints of the school because the girl is extremely restless, hinders the colleagues during the classes, not obey the requests of teachers and not do the proposed tasks. Suspected abuse at the age of 4 by the son of friends at the age of 12. In the evaluation, it demonstrated characteristics of introversion and inhibition; intelligence combined with a great capacity for spatial abstraction and emotional balance, tendency to be self-directed and reflective in their attitudes. It was found possible desire to remain protected, defending itself from what is external to it and regression. Indications of inner pressure in the home; feelings of inadequacy regarding sexual elements and indications of early sexuality. He reproduced the removal and return of the father during the evaluation. |
| C2      | Male child, 8 years old and school for presenting difficulties in the school context, in which teachers report that he has extreme learning difficulties, recognizes the letters, but can not read yet; who behaves aggressively and hostilely in the classroom, both with the teacher and with colleagues, even committing physical aggression so against them. Aspects such as introversion, low level of physical energy to perform tasks, demonstrated to be under intense outside pressure and with difficulty controlling their impulses, indications of an incomplete development combined with immaturity it was also found that it feels discouraging, presenting a strong need to receive external support. He reproduced school conflicts.  |
| C3      | Female child, 7 years and school. Forwarded with the complaint of agitated and impulsive behavior that began with the separation of parents and after the reconciliation of the couple remained. Aspects involving the separation of parents stood out; impulsivity; insecurity; support and conflicts relating to maturing and independence.  |
| C4      | Female child, aged 7 years and school. Mother sought care due to her daughter presenting anguish of separation, demonstrating to be extremely attached to the progenitor, with difficulty and fear in separating herself from it. There was a lack of affection of the father figure, insecurity, retracted and some aspects, discontent, especially when it has to change the environment, has a concern about its behaviors, has shown to like gratification when it concerns her; needs support; need to be safe in the face of difficulties.   |
| C5      | Female child, 9 years and school. A complaint of memorization problem with difficulty retaining content. Very shy. Difficulties in the relationship with the grandmother who has been living in the same house since she became ill. In evaluation, he presented healthy cognitive aspects and good psychic adjustment, with a tendency to be self-directed and centered on his attitudes. Retracted behavior; much concern about yourself and personal dissatisfaction; evidence of insecurity; the need for support and reluctance to establish contact with the environment, due to extreme retracting and excessive shyness in relations with each other. He also revealed aspects of hesitation; anxiety; fear and tendency to behave more reservedly, rigidly and undecidedly.   |
| C6      | Male child, 7 years and school. He was referred by the school for low school performance, difficulty concentrating interaction in the classroom. The insecurity, retracting, immaturity and feelings of inadequacy and discontent accompanied by a certain and concern for the environment were highlighted.   |
| C7      | Male child, 7 years old and school. At 1 year and 7 months, his mother left him in the care of his father and sisters. He currently lives with one of his sisters. The family requested care to see if he was mentally healthy because he realized that he suffers from a lack of his mother. He presented elements of fear of death, feelings of inferiority and search for acceptance. Content related to insecurity also emerged; retracting, anxiety, stiffness, and immaturity.   |
| C8      | Female child, 6 years old and school. The main complaint occurs because the child was extremely emotionally shaken after the death of her father, who according to her mother, she was very close, and also because she has been presenting serious school problems, the teachers complain that she just wants to play at school time, does not respect borders and does not propose to do the activities. He has been shown to be effective with extroversion characteristics and a lot of energy to perform his actions. He presented a need for support and use of covert behavior to camouflage his conflicts; extreme anxiety and tendency to act impulsively. Traces of aggression.  |
|         | Male child, 7 years old, referred by doctor complaining of agitation, impulsive behaviors, irritability and  |

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| C9 | difficulties and performing school activities. In the initial evaluation, the activities were requested, although somewhat withdrawn from the situation. Insecurity, adjustment difficulties in the family environment, aggressiveness, impulsivity, and low self-concept emerged. |
|----|--|

Source: Prepared by the authors

Of the nine children in this study, six came due to complaints of difficulties in school, especially regarding classroom behaviors, one of which also presented issues involving grief and its unfolding stemming from family life and Schooling. Another frequent complaint was difficulties in the family as relationships and issues involving insecurity and fear of separation of the maternal figure.

In the initial evaluations encompassing anamnesis interview, playful interview, and application of the HTP test, the prominent contents in the cases were the difficulties of separation with the maternal figure, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, fear, insecurity, and reproduction of conflicts involving family and school relationships. It should be emphasized that some of the questions that stood out in the initial evaluation should be understood as aspects related to child development itself, in which in the age group of children in the study it is characteristic to demonstrate some insecurity and need for parental support. Moreover, it should also be considered that even if rapport was established, a new situation was still configured for the subjects, in which they were faced with

an unknown (evaluator psychotherapist) and a different place from which they were accustomed to attending.

After the initial evaluations, the group meetings were initiated, in which the short stories and contents illustrated in table 2 were working. It is considered relevant to emphasize that all meetings were previously planned, however, there was no plastering in its structure, allowing adjustments when necessary, thinking about other strategies (tale 2) for the reach of the group. Similarly, [15] reports moments when it was necessary to understand the need of the group and adapt that meeting, which denotes flexibility essential to working with children.

Another aspect that there was a need for care was in the choice of classic tales, starting and adopting those suggested by [3], but also using two stories alternative to classics such as Yellow Riding Hood and Festival in Heaven. When choosing the tale, the therapist has no way of knowing which is the most significant for the child, since he makes the choice for the feelings aroused by the theme in relation to his experiences. Therefore, when the narrative becomes special, the child requests repetition until he alleviates his anguish [3].

Table 2 – Short stories and stories addressed in the group

| SESSION | SUBJECT/TALE                              | CONTENTS INVOLVED  |
|---------|---|--|
| 1       | Contract<br>Knowing the group and members | Rapport. Presentation of therapists and members of the group. Established combinations of the operation of the meetings. |
| 2       | The three little pigs*                    | Development (child, adolescent, and adult); Responsibilities; Independence.  |
| 3       | Little Red Riding Hood*                   | Loss of Innocence; Child Sexual Curiosity; e Fantasies of seduction by an adult.   |
| 4       | Yellow Riding Hood                        | Coping with fears  |
| 5       | Goldilocks*                               | Curiosity; Search for a welcoming home/acceptance.   |
| 6       | The Ugly Duckling*                        | Child Helplessness; Mother-Baby Bond; Anguish of Separation; Feelings of inadequacy and rejection.                       |
| 7       | John and the Beansan Foot*                | Growth; Construction of boy identity; The faces of a father.   |
| 8       | Snow White*                               | Identification of the girl by the mother; Importance of maternal envy; Love and hatred of her daughter for her mother.   |
| 9       | Beauty and the Beast*                     | Acceptance; See beyond appearances.  |
| 10      | Feast in Heaven                           | Repair; Changes and its beauty.  |
| 11      | Peter Pan*                                | Growth   |
| 12      | Closing and favorite stories in the group | Beauty and the Beast; Snow White; John and the Beansan Foot; The Ugly Duckling; Feast in Heaven; Yellow Riding Hood.     |

Source: own authorship. \* Interpretation of Corso & Corso (2006)

About the methodology in child group psychotherapy using the tale as a mediating resource, [6] presents a method for systematizing the sessions, in which initially the story is told, there is room for design, for the dramatic representation of history and discussion about the tale. The author clarifies that there is not a single way to work.

Similarly, the group's meetings were organized starting with storytelling, followed by the dramatization and drawings of the contents captured by the children. In the first meetings, the book used as a resource to assist the narration of the short stories, however, as mentioned by [3], the richness and contents present presented by the children will be richer only with verbal narration and without the book with Images. This aspect can be verified in these first meetings, in which participants showed anxiety in drawing soon what they saw in the books, bringing reproductions, while others did not express a desire to draw and were inhibited.

Without the book, it was observed that the children expressed their conflicts better, asking to dramatize as a way to externalize what was happening to them, as well as talk more than the tale aroused them and what they liked more or not. Thus, after reading the tale the children staged the story and drew it, demonstrating more interest in exposing their internal contents, talking about what they understood and sharing experiences. It is understood that, so they could identify themselves and see themselves in the stories, which was once very restricted.

At the end of the narration, the children were anxious to talk about the tales, which caught their attention, if they knew a variation of them and what they would like to change if they could. Then they staged and presented a certain "speed" to draw, because, as some said, "I cannot forget this", that is, I have to record on paper, bring to reality the fantasy.

In this respect, the tales resemble the transitional objects and their narcissism occurs in a potential space, in the transformation of the real world into something more

bearable by fabulation from what the child plays, creates, invents and imagines, enabling to look at reality in another way [6, 16].

During the meetings, the children were more confident to outsource their anguish, share with therapists and group fantasies and conflicts. They also demonstrated a sense of proximity and belonging that the group provides and thus felt freer to express themselves in speech, staging, and drawings. According to [16], when the child feels free to think about what he likes, play and find the lost parts of his personality, from the psychoanalytic perspective will begin the search for himself.

The group with short stories besides allowing the elaboration of conflicts related to insecurities, aggressiveness, and search for acceptance, contemplated the playful aspect extremely important in the care of children [16].

It was observed in the subjects, evolution in the ability to build reports, put in place the affections and elaborate conflicts. At first, the children identified themselves with the tales and expressed their anguish through the characters, but in the course of the meetings, a movement verified in the group was that children referred not only to the characters but to themselves and how we're feeling and conflict situations. Exemplifying such a situation, there is the encounter in which C2 chose the sad expression as a figure to represent it that day and spent most of the time quiet and away, at one point approached the observer and reported a warning that received in school for bad behavior and how it was affecting him.

Among the tales that most provoked the movement of the group and demonstrated access to the psychic contents of the children has: John and the Beansan Foot The Ugly duckling; Snow White and Beauty and the Beast.

Below, brief synthesis (Table 3) of the analysis of the results of the children's evaluations in the course and after the group in an individual interview.

*Table 3 - Synthesis of the evolution of clinical cases composing the group*

| SUBJECT | EVOLUTION  |
|---------|--|
| C1      | The child always behaved in a retracted way upon arriving, which changed as the group happened. In certain meetings, he behaved with great agitation, but very participatory and attentive to the proposed activities. It is noteworthy that after the drawings that were requested at the end of each story, C1 always asked for an extra sheet and made several disordered risks and with great intensity. The mother reported that she had changed her behaviors at school, that she has carried out the activities proposed by teachers and does not disrespect them as before, however, she stressed that she has had frequent nightmares and woke up at night crying and even walking around the house, he also claimed, that this began to occur after the father's return to the family cycle. |



|    |   |
|----|---|
| C2 | In the initial meetings, he behaved well withdrawn, sometimes asked not to draw the stories, but was always loving and liked to receive hugs from therapists. There was a significant change in their participation in the group, passing until jumping, screaming, playing with the other children and even making drawings with more will and dedication, being visible their change in the dynamics of the group. In attendance with the mother, she stated that C2 no longer behaves aggressively in school and that she has not received any more complaints, but that she continues to take private lessons to improve her writing and reading, which is still a school difficulty. |
| C3 | The relationship in the group changed and it began to express itself more and to participate more effectively in the activities proposed during the group, always wanting to lead and coordinate. The mother reported that she had improved in her aggressive behavior. However, one can still perceive the need for the presence of the father.  |
| C4 | In the group he always spoke, he expressed himself, that is, he has always been participatory in the proposed activities, maintaining a good relationship with all, despite being more related to girls, particularly one of them. I had no difficulty in fulfilling what oriented as an activity, being interested in everything that happened in the group. However, his participation was marked by many absences from the meetings, which may have interfered so that he did not have better results.   |
| C5 | There were many changes in the child's behavior, she had no more difficulties in the relationship with her grandmother, changed her behavior at school in relation to the teacher, who said she did not like it, even communicated with her after the end of classes and became well responsible and active in-home activities. In the group, even remaining quiet and quiet, it was seen as a reference by the other children, and as sessions passed, it was beginning to participate in the activities, and to be more comfortable with the other children, which at first did not occur.  |
| C6 | In a final evaluation and observation in his work in the group, it was noticed that he is a child who adapts easily to the environment, his interaction with the other children of the group was increasing, with respect for the colleague, understanding the space of the other and understanding the rules, however, in their tests, a failure in their cognitive and emotional development was found, a factor that interferes with their school performance, and referrals and orientations were made.   |
| C7 | He's a very observant, polite and intelligent child. At first, quieter, as sessions passed, he interacted more with his colleagues, began to express himself more, in forms of play, as if he was feeling in fact at ease in the group. In return, the sister reported that despite being a quiet child, her behavior has been changing, relating more to school mates, which hardly happened before.   |
| C8 | Participatory in the activities of the group with a lot of energy, in some meetings, caused disorders due to its agitation and demonstrated a lot of voracity when the time of snack came. There was a significant improvement in it, even organizing the group, placing orders, assisting therapists and being extremely attentive about the storytelling. The mother reported that the school has made frequent praise to the child, who completely changed the way she behaves in the classroom, being more participatory and cooperating with the organization, he also stressed that drawing has been one of his favorite activities at home when he gets home from school.          |
| C9 | Initially, he called attention to all the time, was the protagonist of moments of extreme agitation and indiscipline in the group, but always made very coherent placements and although he appeared scattered, understood all the stories narrated, even accompanied the narrations showing knowing details, showed extreme attention when performing the proposed activities, such as drawing, which he did with riches of detail. It is noteworthy that the mother did not attend for a return, that there was this difficulty in its cooperation with what was necessary for the process.   |

Source: own authorship

It was found that all children had evolution in their development and the motivations that led to the search for psychological follow-up decreased or were suppressed, although, in some, the results appeared more significantly,

such as C2 in relation to C4. Moreover, they consider themselves as factors that may have contributed to the better development of the subjects to the frequency of the subjects in the sessions.

They still remain more mildly, questions that in all subjects were scored in the initial evaluations and that is consistent with the development phase that is, such as the search for support (family or trusted person) and some insecurity.

Corroborating, this period of development, of concrete operations, is pointed out as a crucial moment since in it the most important cognitive structures arise, children demonstrate progress in their ability to distinguish between animate and inanimate and already oppose life and death, begin to approach their peers more although the family is the main bond and reference. It also presents some aggressiveness, instability, and need for support and recognition [15, 17].

Throughout the group visits, as well as in the individual reassessment with the children, it was possible to understand how significant psychotherapy was and assisted in the evolution of children with decreased initial complaints that led them to the psychological follow-up. Also, in the interviews and returns with their parents, they brought how important the care was for the improvement of children and in the interaction itself in the family context.

Thus, from the research project, we investigated the effectiveness of the use of short stories in group child psychotherapy, in which the results achieved culminated in an extension project in the School of Psychology Service.

Finally, it is emphasized that this study does not contain, questions about the applicability and efficacy of the use of short stories in other contexts, which suggests new research on this resource, since there are few empirical studies, especially in psychotherapy, with the Tales.

#### IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the experience with the group brokered by short stories, it was found that the use of such a resource stimulated the imagination through stories, as well as the expression of the inner world of children.

Moreover, the use of the tale, in child psychotherapy, revealed to be a rich resource enabling children to approach their conflicts and bringing encouragement to the psychic suffering with these, which express through the tales in the group, themes such as affective, low lack self-concept and aggressiveness in the face of situations experienced in the family and school environment, as well as related to child development and the stage they are. There was a general improvement in the ability to build reports, put in place affections, the enrichment of imaginary life, the possibility of expressing and elaborating conflicts, especially linked,

anxiety, insecurity, and self-acceptance.

As can be verified in the course of the sessions, even though there is no rigidity regarding the methodology for performing the groups with short stories, significant differences in group dynamics and individual repercussions of narratives with the use were observed of the books with images and without them, using only the orality and expressions of the narrator. Participants were able to better express their identifications and representations of unconscious content without the use of books. Finally, although it is a theme that has been researched in the area of psychology and education, it remains a fertile field for further studies and application.

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