



Methods Of Developing Cognitive Skills In 4–5-Year-Old Children Through Children's Folklore

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pedagogical potential of children's folklore for developing cognitive skills in 4–5-year-old children, drawing primarily on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Particular attention is paid to perception, sensorimotor schemes, intuitive thinking, symbolic function, and the transition from reproductive skills to productive cognitive activity. Riddles, fairy tales, counting rhymes, tongue twisters, and movement songs are considered not merely as cultural texts, but as pedagogical tools that can encourage children to perceive, compare, remember, predict, transform, and transfer acquired modes of action to new situations. Based on theoretical content analysis and pedagogical modelling, a four-stage model of folklore-based cognitive activity is proposed.

KEYWORDS: Cognitive skills, children's folklore, preschool education, 4–5-year-old children, Jean Piaget, intuitive thinking, symbolic function, cognitive development.

INTRODUCTION

The development of cognitive skills in preschool children is one of the important objectives of contemporary early childhood education. At the age of four to five, children increasingly move beyond direct perception and begin to compare objects and events, establish simple relationships, use symbolic representations, reconstruct sequences, and express assumptions through language. Therefore, educational activities designed for this age group should combine perception, speech, movement, imagery, memory, and active problem solving.

Children's folklore has considerable potential in this respect because of its rhythmic, repetitive, figurative, symbolic, and interactive nature. Fairy tales, riddles, counting rhymes, tongue twisters, and movement songs engage children not only in listening and reproduction but also in remembering, comparing, anticipating, interpreting, and transforming information.

From the perspective of Piaget's theory, cognitive development cannot be reduced to the mechanical acquisition of ready-made knowledge. Children construct and reorganize their cognitive schemes through active interaction with objects and situations. For this reason, the educational value of folklore should also be considered in terms of how children perceive its elements, process relationships between them, test their assumptions, and transfer acquired strategies to new situations.

The purpose of this study is to identify and systematize the pedagogical possibilities of children's folklore for developing cognitive skills in 4–5-year-old children on the basis of Piaget's concepts of perception, sensorimotor schemes, intuitive thinking, symbolic function, and cognitive adaptation.

Methods

The study employed theoretical content analysis, comparative analysis, pedagogical interpretation, and modelling. Selected concepts from Piaget's *The Psychology of Intelligence* concerning perception and intelligence, habits and sensorimotor intelligence, the development of thinking, symbolic function, and social factors of intellectual development were analysed.

These theoretical categories were pedagogically compared with the structural and functional characteristics of folklore genres commonly used with preschool children, including riddles, fairy tales, counting rhymes, tongue twisters, finger plays, and movement songs. The analysis focused on determining which cognitive actions may be stimulated when a child does not simply reproduce folklore material but actively compares, reorganizes, interprets, and applies it.

The proposed interpretation does not imply that Piaget developed a methodology for teaching through children's folklore. Rather, his theoretical concepts are used as a methodological framework for pedagogical interpretation and modelling.

Results And Discussion

The analysis indicates that different folklore genres can support different but interconnected cognitive actions.

Riddles encourage children to identify relevant features, compare several possible objects, reject inappropriate answers, formulate hypotheses, and justify their choices. A child who initially relies on one salient characteristic can gradually be encouraged to coordinate several features. Thus, the pedagogical value of a riddle extends beyond recalling a familiar answer and involves perceptual search, comparison, and elementary reasoning.

Fairy tales provide opportunities for children to reconstruct sequences of events, identify relationships between characters and actions, anticipate subsequent events, and suggest alternative solutions. From a cognitive perspective, retelling should therefore not be limited to the exact reproduction of a text. Activities such as arranging episodes in the correct order, identifying a missing event, predicting what may happen next, or explaining a character's action can transform reproductive recall into active cognitive processing.

Counting rhymes and other rhythmic folklore forms combine verbal material with rhythm, sequence, movement, and rules. Memorising a counting rhyme represents a reproductive level of activity. However, changing the number of participants, adapting the rhythm to a new game, identifying a missing rhythmic unit, or continuing a sequence under altered conditions requires greater cognitive flexibility and working-memory involvement.

Tongue twisters similarly move beyond mechanical repetition when children are asked to identify an error, compare sound patterns, regulate the pace of speech, or independently correct an inaccurate pronunciation. Such tasks can contribute to phonemic perception, verbal monitoring, attention, and self-regulation.

The symbolic nature of folklore is particularly relevant to children aged four to five. According to Piaget's developmental framework, this age corresponds to the period in which intuitive and visually based thinking plays a major role. Fairy-tale images, metaphorical riddles, dramatization, imitation, gestures, and symbolic play therefore provide developmentally appropriate contexts in which children can represent absent objects and events through words, images, and actions.

Based on the theoretical analysis, a four-stage model of folklore-based cognitive activity is proposed.

At the first stage – active perception, the educator presents the folklore material expressively while directing the child's attention to significant features, repeated words, characters, actions, or rhythmic elements. The child is encouraged to observe and search rather than remain a passive listener.

At the second stage – reproductive-action activity, the child reproduces the text through speech, rhythm, gesture, facial expression, or movement. Repetition at this stage serves as a foundation for coordinating verbal and sensorimotor schemes rather than as an end in itself.

At the third stage – transformative-analytical activity, familiar material is intentionally modified. For example, pictures representing fairy-tale episodes may be rearranged, an irrelevant feature may be added to a riddle, a sound may be changed in a tongue twister, or a rhythmic unit may be omitted from a counting rhyme. The child identifies the inconsistency, explains it, and reconstructs an appropriate version.

At the fourth stage – transfer and cooperation, children apply an acquired strategy in a new context. They may create a new riddle using a familiar structure, propose another solution for a fairy-tale character, or adapt a counting rhyme to a different movement game. Children then compare their solutions with those of their peers and provide simple explanations for their choices.

Accordingly, the transition from reproductive to productive cognitive activity can be expressed through the following pedagogical sequence:

perception → reproduction → comparison and transformation → transfer and justification.

This sequence suggests that the developmental potential of children's folklore depends not only on the selected folklore genre but also on the way in which the educator organizes the child's interaction with it. If a folklore text is used exclusively for memorisation and reproduction, its cognitive potential may remain limited. When children are encouraged to compare, predict, detect inconsistencies, reconstruct sequences, justify answers, and transfer familiar strategies to new situations, folklore can become a structured medium for cognitive activity.

Conclusion

The theoretical analysis demonstrates that children's folklore can be pedagogically interpreted as a developmentally appropriate means of supporting cognitive skills in 4–5-year-old children. Riddles can stimulate perceptual search, comparison, and hypothesis formation; fairy tales can support memory, sequencing, prediction, and narrative thinking; counting rhymes can integrate attention, working memory, rhythm, and self-regulation; and symbolic folklore activities can contribute to intuitive and representational thinking.

The main methodological principle proposed in this study is that reproduction should function as a starting point rather than the final objective of folklore-based learning. Cognitive development is more effectively supported when children progress from perceiving and reproducing folklore material to comparing, transforming, explaining, and applying acquired strategies in new situations.

Thus, the proposed four-stage model — active perception, reproductive action, transformative analysis, and transfer through cooperation — provides a theoretical and methodological framework for organizing folklore-based cognitive activities with 4–5-year-old children. The

model is theoretical and pedagogical in nature; therefore, its effectiveness should be examined in further experimental research using clearly defined diagnostic criteria and indicators.

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