MICROSOFT POWER POINT XP: AN INNOVATIVE TOOL TO DELIVER AESOP'S FABLES

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ABSTRACT
Many worldwide efforts have been made recently in restructuring teacher education programs. Prospective teachers must be better prepared for the ever-changing world in which, technology plays a prominent role in their training. General computer applications such as Word Processing, Database, Spreadsheets, Presentation and Programming/Authoring software are part of most curricula for training future teachers. As fresh graduates begin to implement technologies in classrooms and examine its role in education, they recognize and appreciate the importance of the integration of technology in education. This paper provides an example of how Intercollege fourth year early childhood students incorporated technology in Fairy Tale curriculum. They created and delivered animated Aesop's Fables using Presentation Software Microsoft Power Point XP. Aesop's Fables are known worldwide, popular, simple, instructive and their characters are archetypes. Centuries later, Aesop is a source of inspiration for educators through rewritings and adaptations (Papanicolaou-Tsilimeni, 1998) Furthermore this work, presents the preparation of activities that are based on the Fables. Microsoft Power Point can be used to introduce a Fable's concept or to reinforce a concept that has been introduced through the traditional method. Also, these are creative activities which aim to develop critical thinking skills as well as children's cognitive capabilities. The results of designing and using developmentally appropriate materials for delivering an Aesop's Fable in practical application case studies are reported.

KEYWORDS
Aesop's fables, Presentation Software, Early childhood curriculum, cognitive abilities, developmentally appropriate activities

INTRODUCTION

Technology plays a significant role in all aspects of our lives today, and this role will only increase in the future. The potential benefits of technology for young children's learning and development are well documented (Wright & Shade, 1994). As technology becomes available and easier to use, educating young children to use technology becomes more widespread.

It is of great importance that early childhood educators are prepared to use technology to benefit children and to critically examine the impact of technology on them. Early childhood educators should be able to use information technologies to expand the boundaries of their classroom and enrich the learning experiences of their students.
Used appropriately, technology can improve children's thinking ability and help them learn to work in groups. Developmentally appropriate technology based activities engage children in conversation and creative play. They also help develop children's problem solving abilities.

This paper provides examples of implementing Presentation Software Microsoft Power Point XP in the delivery of Aesop's Fables as well as the preparation of on and off-computer activities based on the Fables.

AESOP'S FABLES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

Aesop's Fables are characterized as social or instructive stories. They always end with an instructive moral. This moral "seems to agree with the established situation and justify a totally conventional morality" (Kanatsouli, 1997). This instructive nature of Aesop's Fables is often the main element that leads so many educators to use them in class with young children. The first attempt to use Aesopian fables in a Greek school's curriculum was in Odecca by ConstantinosVardalachos in 1830 (Vretos 1857).

Another asset of using the Fables with young children is that they are written in a simple structure and style. This means that they are accessible and easily understood by children. Finally, they are short and they fit well with young children's attention span.

The Fables' characters are mainly animals, which are popular and familiar to children. The animals tend to be archetypes. Every animal, according to its virtues or its vices, is related to a behavior, an attitude or a quality, recognized as such by everyone. Sometimes, the same animal may appear in two or three Fables, with a different attitude, but with the same main characteristics.

Though the Fables seem to fit ideally with children's audience, not all are appropriate to be presented to today's young children. Amongst the 358 Fables (Vournas, *undated*)- the first Greek editions of 17th century have around 150 fables (Parasoglou G.M., 1993) some ought to be adapted to modern understanding of social justice and equality. For example, there are Fables that suggest that trying to overcome who we are or change our fate, is – due to our nature or our heritage. A sensitive reader, listener, spectator, and even more so an educator can only feel embarrassed and confused by such Fable.
Innovative presentations of Aesop's Fables give the educator the opportunity to rectify beliefs belonging to the past when practices such as slavery, or values such as superiority due to descent were completely compatible and acceptable by the aristocracy.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM AND COMPUTERS

As technology becomes more accessible to early childhood programs (curriculum) and computer software becomes more user-friendly, early childhood educators have the responsibility to examine its impact on young children and prepare themselves to use it for all children's benefit.

Learning through exploration, creative problem solving and self-guided instructions are concepts that are better achieved with the use of computers. Realizing this potential demands a simultaneous focus on the curriculum and technology innovations (Hohmann, 1994).

The use of technology in the curriculum is based on:

- children's needs
- the focus of the curriculum
- the enrichment of children's educational opportunities and experiences.

Effectively integrating technology into the curriculum demands effort, time, commitment, and, sometimes, even a change in one's beliefs.

Teaching our students to properly integrate technology in their early childhood curriculum, we focused their attention on the following critical points:

1. their vital role in evaluating developmentally appropriate uses of technology and the possible benefits in early childhood programs (Aesop's Fables delevery);
2. the integration of technology into the typical Fables learning environment;
   - employing technology in the curriculum based on the children's needs
   - employing technology in the curriculum based on the focus of the curriculum
   - Will technology benefit children's educational opportunities and experiences?
   - Is it developmentally appropriate?
   - Will this activity improve child's cognitive capabilities?
3. the use of technology involving engaging children with special need
4. as educators of tomorrow, to utilize technology for their professional development

In order to allow children gain the greatest benefits from technology's integration in the Fairy Tale (Aesop's fables) learning the presentation and the activities to follow are of great importance.

Drill-and-practice or computer–assisted instruction (CAI) software is frequently used to strengthen academic performance. While such software leads to gain in certain skills, it has not been as effective in improving the conceptual skills of children (Clements and Nastasi, 1993). Even though Discovery-based software encourages and allows free exploration, it is more valuable in this regard. However, Lemerise (1993) in his research has shown that children work best with this type of software when they are assigned to open-ended projects rather than asked merely to "free explore". Children spend more time and actively search for various ways to solve the task in contrast to the group of children who are allowed to explore freely, were disinterested quite soon.

Another concern was that computers would replace other early childhood activities. Research shows that computer activities yield the best results when coupled with suitable off-computer activities. For example, children who are exposed to developmental software alone —the on-computer group— show gains in intelligence, non-verbal skills, long-term memory, and manual dexterity. Those who also worked with supplemental activities, in comparison —the off-computer group— gained in all of these areas and improved their scores in verbal, problem-solving, and conceptual skills (Haugland, 1992).

After delivering an animated Aesop's Fable, the educator asks a number of questions so as to check whether children understood the Fable. They can also see the scenes printed out on the board. After this, children are separated into groups to work with the activities based on the Fable (examples are presented in the following section). This gives children the chance to enjoy the animated Fable and also work in groups with on and off-computer activities

Technology also offers unique ways to assess children. Computers provide teachers with a "window into a child's thinking process" by observing the child at the work place (Weir et al. 1982). Sometimes, beneficial effects appear only after a year. If educators observe their students on a regular basis they can chart their learning process. (Cochran-Smith et al 1988).

The implication for teaching is the need for consistent, long-term observation. Yet another opportunity offered to educators by technology is to become pioneers themselves. Because educators know their students best, they can best create the appropriate activities that will help them.

It is evident that we need to prepare early childhood professionals to integrate technology into the curriculum.

Educators must use computers as a natural part of the learning experience to gain the most of this powerful tool. This includes:

- Integrating computers within the classroom environment
- Using them as a part of the everyday curriculum
- Applying their use to real problems for a real purpose (Davis & Shade, 1994)

Opportunities to aid Aesop's Fables learning in the early childhood curriculum are addressed in the following section.

AESOP'S FABLES: AN INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY-BASED DELIVERY

Technology penetrates many aspects of our lives and provides us with an opportunity to enhance learning for children in our schools.

In this paper, we present some practical examples of using Technology to deliver an Aesop's Fable for preschoolers. Research has convinced us that computers can be both developmentally appropriate and powerful for educating young children (Clements, 1994).

These activities are based on children's experiences and interests, with an emphasis on supporting the development of the Fable activity. We emphasize in creating models of activity based on the Fable's context. To accomplish this, we will be creating computer environments to supplement a wide range of off-computer activities. Compared to the old fashioned Aesop's Fable activities, which are:

- scatter the scenes and ask children to put them in the right order
- hide a scene and ask children to find which scene is missing
- mix some scenes and ask children to find the right order

These new computer-based activities had significantly greater gains in intelligence, verbal and non verbal skills, structural knowledge, long term memory, problem solving and conceptual skills.

To create these on and off-computer activities we used Microsoft's Presentation Software Power Point XP. Microsoft Power Point XP is simple to use and accessible in almost every PC. There are numerous software available to create a Aesop's Fable and/or present an activity, but they require special training for the educators and furthermore installation on the current computer. Power Point XP is very powerful presentation software and enables educators to prepare/deliver an Aesop's Fable, and create on and off-computer activities.

In particular educators can use Power Point to:

- Create a Aesop's Fable using animation, graphics, and other multimedia components from which Aesop's Fable concepts can be developed.
- Create an interactive activity presentation that runs automatically
- Print handouts (Fable scenes, activities) for the students.
- Create notes for themselves to aid their Aesop's Fable presentation delivery.

In this paper, we present two ways of implementing PowerPoint in the classroom:

- as a tool for presenting an animated Aesop's Fables
- as a means of preparing on and off-computer Fable based activities.

In both cases students are actively involved in a new exciting learning process and a group work is encouraged.

Activity "Puzzle"

Using any scene of the Aesop's Fable to create a puzzle.

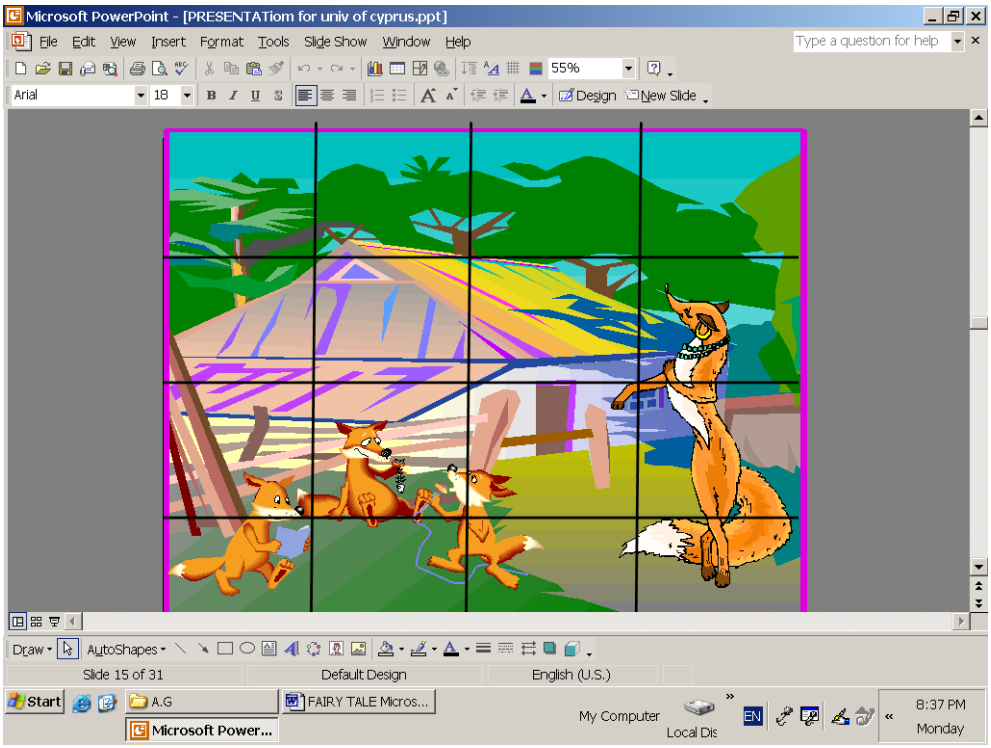

Figure 1. The Puzzle activity

When children work on puzzles, they are actually "putting the pieces together" in more ways than one. Puzzles help children build the skills they need to read, write, solve problems, and coordinate their thoughts and actions – all of which they will use in school and beyond. Finding a puzzle with a scene of the Fable will help children analyze/understand the Fable concept better.

Children can work on puzzles by themselves, or they can work together as a team and practice compromising and getting along together. Because each child must concentrate on the puzzle individually, he/she experiences a scene of satisfaction as he/she picks up a piece, rotates it, and discovers the spot in which it fits. Piece by piece, he/she begins to recognize the scene of the Fable that the puzzle represents.

Three-year-old enjoyed puzzles with single knobs on each piece, but they could also work on puzzles with five to eight pieces. Four-year-olds enjoyed knobbles puzzles with Aesop's Fable scenes and characters. They could handle 12 to 18-piece puzzles. Five-year-old can easily handle large or small piece 18 to 35 pieces puzzles. They move from the pleasure of the activity to mastering the task

Puzzles can provide formal learning experiences. Educators may work closely with children to help them learn to solve problems through puzzles. Puzzles also help them learn to solve problems (better understand Fables concepts) through puzzles. Puzzles also helped early childhood students observe children and assess their development. While children were working alone or in groups, educators could monitor the way they spoke, moved and concentrated.

Activity "Missing Characters"

Removing from any Aesop's Fable scene the characters.

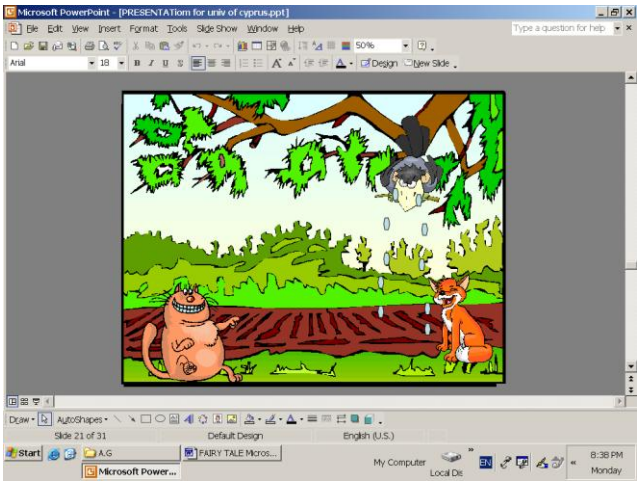

Figure 2. The Missing Characters Activity

This activity aims to the development of memory and attention. The teacher, after presenting the animated Fable he/she shows the students a scene with some characters missing. The child must recognize the scene and place the heroes at their correct position and then describe the scene to the teacher. He/she can drug-and-drop the characters and place them at the right place on the scene. The teacher can also prepare this activity in Microsoft Word XP by printing the scene and the characters (cut off) separately and work using a board in front of the whole class. Print out the scene on one page and the characters on a separate page. The characters must be cut so that the child can place them on the scene.

Activity "Find the place of the missing pieces"

Take any Aesop's Fable scene and cut certain pieces (triangles or squares or circles of the same size).

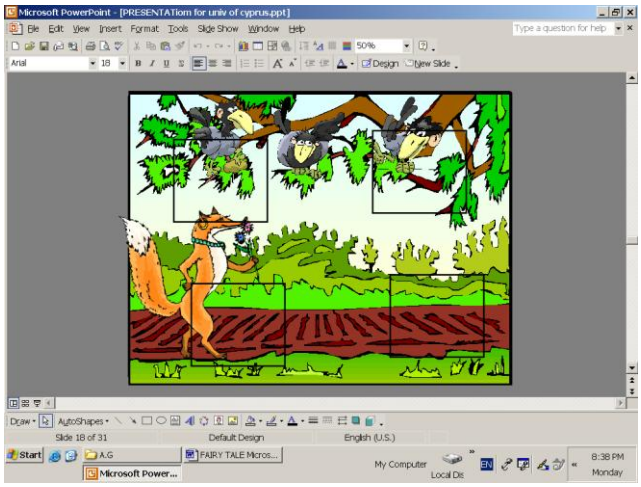

Figure 3. Find the place of the missing pieces activity

This activity aims to the development of children's spatial perception (size, form, position, spatial relationships between objects). After delivering the Aesop's Fables the teacher shows the children a scene from an Aesop's Fable with some missing pieces (as mentioned above) and asks the students to recognize the scene. Then after talking about the scene, the teacher gives the missing pieces to the students and asks them to find their place on the scene.

Activity "Choose Who/What was in the scene"

For the development of visual memory thinking processes and perception.

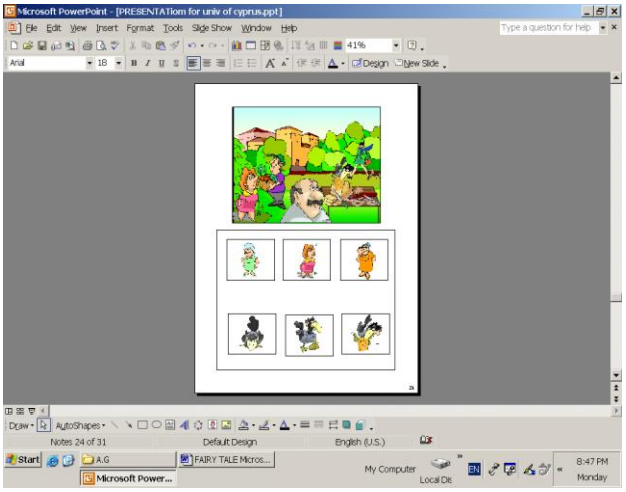

Figure 4. Choose Who/What was in the scene activity

Show to the children a scene from the Fable for 30-50 seconds, then give them three options for any character and/or item that is in the scene by asking him to choose who/what was in the scene. After finding the correct answers, the children can see the scene and describe it to the teacher.

APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN AESOP'S FABLE CURRICULUM: INTERCOLLEGE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS' COMMENTS

Intercollege early childhood fourth year students integrated Power Point XP in the delivery of Aesop's Fables during their practical training. The students that were allowed to apply and deliver fable integrating technology were only fourth year students (senior early childhood education students). The sample consisted of five sections of twenty students each, respectively. Every student was assigned to deliver a fable to approximately twenty kindergarten children. After one month of integration, they stated a number of comments concerning the use of technology in the teaching of early math concepts. The major problem mentioned, by a large number of students, is that the shift from the traditional way of teaching demands effort, time, commitment, and change in ones beliefs.

Here are some of their negative comments:

- *"School headmasters or owners are not aware of this new learning environment. They did not support the integration. They preferred the traditional way."*
- *"Lack of computers and projectors in our classroom."*
- *"I prefer delivering Aesop's tales the traditional way, it requires no extra time and effort."*

- *"At present, I'm aware of the possibilities. I'm convinced that there must be enormous potentials, though it requires extra time and a lot of effort for preparation."*
- *"I use a computer for my administrational duties as well. I believe that computers may help us both, future educators and children to achieve our goals, though it's a huge amount of work."*
- *"I'm very willing to use it but we need to have the technology in the kindergarten's classroom."*
- *"The college should organize workshops and training seminars for all the educators on how to use this tool to create and deliver the fables and the activities"*
- *"There are no computers in kindergartens in Cyprus. I could only prepare the activities on my personal computer, print them out and take them to class. It takes a lot of effort though."*

Advantages of using technology:

Despite the difficulties, it is obvious that early childhood students found these new activities very beneficial for themselves as well as for the children.

Here are some of their positive statements:

- *"Presentation Software is very helpful and early childhood educators should get accustomed to using technology in their Fairy Tale curriculum. Children find animated story interesting and amusing; besides, it helps them avoid the usual routine."*
- *"After only two weeks of using Power Point Presentation along with a projector in the delivery of Aesop's Fables, I noticed that my students could coordinate their thoughts and actions and cooperate better with their peers."*
- *"I am currently using Power Point to create Fables or story activities (handouts) and children are excited with them. I can say that I am the only one who knows exactly the needs of my students."*
- *"Using Power Point XP I managed to rewrite and adapt Aesop's fable "The Woman and the Chicken" and present it to my class in a very fascinating way. I strongly recommend this tool for delivering any story or fable."*
- "*After using Power Point to present these activities in my Aesop's Fable curriculum I noticed that my students were so excited they asked for more!*"
- *"After only one week of delivering animated Aesop's fables and worked out the activities, this proved to be beneficial for the development of their attention and memory."*
- *"Using Microsoft Power Point XP, I created a full animation Aesop's Fable. Watching the fable my students answered successfully to all questions and were actively involved in the activities. They asked to see the fable again"*

CONCLUSION

When educators integrate creative uses of technology into their developmentally appropriate curriculum, children have opportunities to express themselves, communicate and interact with others.

It is essential that early childhood educators make the effort to implement changes in delivering a story or /fable, classroom practice and evaluation of the learning process. Educators are the only ones who know their student's best can create appropriate activities that will help enhance the learning process.

In order to enrich the learning process of the story telling curriculum, educators must shift from the traditional way of delivering a story, even though this requires extra effort, time, commitment and sometimes even a change in their beliefs.

For a proper integration educators must be fully aware of the numerous Aesop's Fables, appropriate story telling pedagogy, the concepts of cognitive abilities, the use of technology and its integration in the curriculum.
Implementing animated Aesop's Fables in the early childhood curriculum can enhance children's opportunities for problem solving and reasoning as well as enrich their learning experiences.

Efforts on shifting from the traditional ways of delivering a story or fable have already begun and must continue if we want to successfully implement a new vision of powerful learning environments for young children.

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