

***FATHER HIMALAYA: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S STORIES BASED
ON A HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL FIGURE IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOL
LIBRARIES¹***

**Padre Himalaya: a importância do conto infantil a partir de uma figura histórica e
espiritual nas bibliotecas escolares portuguesas**

NOGUEIRA, Joana²

Abstract

This article aims to understand how exploring stories featuring historical and spiritual characters that are potentially resonant with children and young people, while fostering school library resources, fosters critical thinking and creativity. The theoretical framework highlights the relevance of stories in transmitting cultural and spiritual values. This acknowledges the importance of these stories for the comprehensive development of students and for fostering critical thinking, creativity, and the appreciation of historical and spiritual heritage. The conclusion is that integrating these narratives into school libraries fosters ethical development and active citizenship.

Resumo

Este artigo visa compreender de que forma a exploração de contos com personagens históricas e espirituais de potencial receção infantojuvenil, com dinamização da biblioteca escolar, fomenta o pensamento crítico e a criatividade das crianças. O enquadramento teórico evidencia a relevância dos contos na transmissão de valores culturais e espirituais. Trata-se do reconhecimento da importância destes contos para o desenvolvimento integral dos(as) alunos(as) e para a promoção do pensamento crítico, da criatividade e da valorização do património histórico e espiritual. Conclui-se que a integração da exploração destas narrativas na biblioteca escolar potencia a formação ética e a cidadania ativa.

Key-words: *School Library, Children's Stories, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Values*

Palavras-chave: *Biblioteca Escolar, Contos infantis, Criatividade, Pensamento crítico, Valores.*

Submission date: July 2024 | **Publication date:** September 2024.

¹ Standardized article, formatted and placed in the template by the team of volunteers at MUNDIS – Aassociação Cívica de Formação e Cultura. <https://www.mundiseventos.pt/>

² JOANA NOGUEIRA – Escola Superior de Educação Jean Piaget, PORTUGAL. Email: joanogueira@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand how the pedagogical exploration of children's and young adult stories that incorporate historical and spiritual characters in the school library can foster critical thinking and creativity in children. In this context, it is assumed that children's and young adult stories are not merely stories for entertainment, as they contain ethical, cultural, and spiritual values, while simultaneously stimulating imagination, reflection, and the ability to question the world (Bastos, 1999; Martins, 2013; Morgado & Pires, 2010).

The integration of stories with historical and spiritual characters and themes into reading programs and cultural activities, embedded in popular or traditional narratives, provides opportunities for children to engage with the content of the narratives, exploring themes relevant to their personal and social development. Consequently, in conjunction with pedagogical practice, the school library can enhance reading and exploration activities of stories as a way to strengthen the role of stories in the child's development (Traça, 1998). In this context, the selection and pedagogical exploration of children's stories inspired by historical and spiritual figures can contribute, through real or legendary characters, to bringing children closer to their cultural heritage, while inviting them to reflect on moral dilemmas and universal values. It therefore allows for the articulation of tradition (through traditional narratives of oral transmission, such as tales, legends, myths, or biographies) with the children's imagination, as a strategy to develop creativity and the ability to conceive new stories and solutions to everyday problems.

The theoretical framework highlights a close relationship between children's and young adult stories and the transmission of ethical and spiritual values, traditionally with pedagogical-moralizing functions, to which the development of critical thinking and creativity has more recently been associated (Rocha, 1984; Oliveira, 2008; Rodari, 2017).

1. Children's and young adult stories, critical thinking, and creativity.

Children's stories play a fundamental role in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. Among the multiple potentialities of this literary genre, its ability to stimulate critical thinking and creativity stands out (Martins, 2013), skills considered essential to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Through listening to, reading, exploring, and recreating stories, children develop their imagination, but also learn to analyze, interpret, and question the world around them. This connection between children's stories, critical thinking, and creativity is widely explored in scientific literature, which highlights stories as powerful pedagogical tools in promoting critical, reflective, and creative minds (Araújo, Azevedo & Araújo, 2013).

Critical thinking is a cognitive skill that involves the ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate information autonomously and reflectively. In the early years of schooling, this thinking can be encouraged through activities that promote the interpretation of narratives and reflective discussion about their content. Children's stories, due to their simple and accessible structure, are privileged vehicles for this type of learning. In this regard, Borisová and Pintes (2023) point out that storytelling followed by debates and narrative reconstruction activities allows children to explore different points of view and find alternative solutions to the problems presented in the stories.

This practice is similar to the Philosophy for Children methodology, developed by Matthew Lipman (1977, 1990), in which philosophical dialogue based on fictional narratives fosters argumentation, hypothesis formulation, and the development of a critical stance towards knowledge (Naldoniová, 2023).

To foster a constantly questioning attitude, Vásquez and Ruiz-Pérez (2021) suggest using incomplete stories, inviting children to imagine and construct different endings, as an effective pedagogical strategy for developing critical thinking at an early age. By being challenged to reflect on the characters' actions and their consequences, children are encouraged to question, infer, and compare different possibilities.

By integrating a playful dimension into pedagogical practices of narrative exploration, Muryanti and Herman (2016) emphasize that the puzzle-format approach to stories, in which children reorganize parts of the narrative according to their interpretation, has proven to be an effective strategy for developing analytical and critical skills, promoting reflection on narrative coherence, causality, and the intentionality of the text.

Creativity is a skill intrinsically linked to childhood and can be greatly stimulated through children's literature. In this context, illustrated stories and open narratives are especially effective in promoting creativity, as they offer multiple interpretive possibilities and invite invention and the creation of new stories. The interaction between

text and image, present in many children's books, expands the space for imagination and symbolic experimentation (Oliveira, 2007; Azevedo, F. F., 2010; Lena et al., 2024). Storytelling followed by creative activities, such as dramatization, illustration, or the recreation of alternative endings, enhances children's creative capacity, challenging them to imagine new worlds, characters, and scenarios (Kurniatin and Aryani, 2021). This process of "creative recreation" is essential for the development of divergent thinking, capable of generating innovative solutions to fictional and real problems.

In this context, stories with philosophical and ethical content, such as those used in Philosophy for Children programs, are especially effective in promoting reflective creativity, in which the invention of stories is accompanied by critical reflection on values and moral dilemmas (Fard et al., 2016).

Critical thinking and creativity, although often presented as distinct skills, are complementary skills. Thinking critically implies the ability to question and evaluate different ideas, while thinking creatively involves the ability to generate new ideas and original solutions.

In children's and young adult stories, these two dimensions coexist and reinforce each other. In this regard, studies conducted in school settings indicate that activities based on children's stories that involve critical interpretation, debate, and artistic creation simultaneously lead to improved critical thinking and expanded creativity (Linares, 2022).

The combination of reflection and creative expression fosters a learning environment in which children are encouraged to think "outside the box" while analyzing and questioning the internal logic of narratives. This integrated development is favored when stories address themes relevant to children, such as characters facing ethical or social dilemmas, inviting them to reflect and propose creative solutions (Alrashede, 2017). By becoming emotionally involved with the characters and their decisions, children not only develop empathy, but also train their ability to imagine alternatives and consequences, processes that are essential for critical and creative thinking.

Children's stories are therefore privileged instruments for promoting critical thinking and creativity in children. Through the interpretation, discussion, and recreation of narratives, children learn to question, reflect, and imagine, developing essential skills for their intellectual, emotional, and social growth. As the studies discussed demonstrate,

the pedagogical exploration of children's stories allows for the construction of stimulating learning environments, where critical analysis and creative invention mutually nourish each other, contributing to the formation of more reflective and creative children (Azevedo, 2011).

2. Children's stories and the transmission of ethical, cultural, and spiritual values.

Children's stories, in addition to their playful and aesthetic function (Ramos, 2012), play an essential role in the transmission of ethical, cultural, and spiritual values (Hoster Cabo & Ruiz Campos, 2013). Through narrative, children come into contact with behavioral models, moral dilemmas, and cultural expressions that contribute to the construction of their identity and sense of belonging. From traditional tales to contemporary narratives, ethical values, cultural traits, and spiritual reflections are woven into the plots and characters, influencing children's worldview and promoting ethically and culturally rooted socialization (Traça, 1998).

Scientific literature has widely recognized the role of fairy tales in shaping character and moral development in children. Classic and contemporary children's stories often present ethical dilemmas that compel children to reflect on concepts such as justice, honesty, courage, compassion, and solidarity. These values emerge both through the characters' actions and their consequences, offering children opportunities for reflection and identification. According to Balakrishnan & Thambu (2017), the process of listening to and discussing fairy tales reinforces children's moral reasoning skills, allowing them to understand the impact of their choices and the importance of empathy and cooperation. The act of a child reading or listening, placing themselves in the role of the characters and considering their decisions, is a practice that, from an early age, can help them form a moral compass that will guide their future actions and social relationships.

The close relationship between children's and young adult literature and forms of religious sentiment and Christian religious traditions has always played a significant role in the moral formation of children and young people (Guerreiro, 1978; Rocha, 1984). In other cultures and other religious confessions, it should be noted that stories of Islamic inspiration have been used in educational contexts to transmit values such as honesty, respect and generosity, adapting them to the contemporary realities of children, without losing the connection with the underlying spiritual tradition (Faizin & Helandri, 2023).

Children's and young adult stories are simultaneously mirrors of the culture of origin and windows to other cultures. This dual function allows children to recognize and value their cultural heritage, while developing an openness to diversity and intercultural respect, oriented towards integration and tolerance. (Gomes, Ramos & Silva, 2009). In particular, traditional tales reflect the values, beliefs, and customs of different communities, contributing to the preservation of cultural memory and the continuity of oral traditions (Humaira, 2017).

The use of stories with elements of local wisdom in school libraries has proven effective in promoting cultural pride and valuing traditional narratives as intangible heritage, linking the past to the present and fostering a sense of belonging and cultural identity in children (Suwartini & Merawati, 2019).

In the European context, Já'far and Al-Ajeely (2019) state that stories inspired by multicultural and migratory traditions offer children the opportunity to come into contact with diverse cultures, promoting respect for difference and valuing cultural diversity as a common richness.

Beyond ethical and cultural values, children's stories are also a privileged space for exploring children's spirituality. This dimension, often neglected in school curricula, involves the child's ability to reflect on the meaning of life, their place in the world, and their relationship with the transcendent. Narratives that address themes such as nature, solidarity, or the mystery of life and death awaken a natural spirituality in children, which manifests itself through curiosity, wonder, and empathy (Mata-McMahon, 2019).

Children's and young adult literature of a spiritual or philosophical nature allows children to engage with metaphysical and ethical dimensions in a playful and accessible way. The fantasy narratives of C.S. Lewis, for example, are often used to introduce concepts such as "good" and "evil," "free will," and "spiritual transcendence," contributing to the spiritual development of young readers (Lee, 2014). Promoting spirituality through stories in the school library can thus create a safe space where children can reflect on existential questions, explore their spiritual identity, and develop an ethical relationship with themselves, with others, and with the universe around them.

Furthermore, in the school library, the pedagogical exploration of children's stories can be structured to integrate reading, discussion, and artistic creation activities that allow children to appropriate the ethical, cultural, and spiritual values present in the narratives. Strategies such as dramatizing stories, recreating alternative endings, or writing stories inspired by community and spiritual values are examples of effective pedagogical practices. Poskakalova (2023) also emphasizes that the use of digital or multimedia stories can also enhance the transmission of values, especially when combined with guided discussions and collaborative activities that encourage ethical and cultural reflection in groups.

Children's stories are therefore a privileged tool for transmitting ethical, cultural, and spiritual values. Their pedagogical exploration in the school library offers children not only contact with literary and cultural heritage, but also the opportunity to reflect on their role in the world, strengthening their personal, cultural, and spiritual identity.

3. Between tradition and imagination: exploring stories with historical and spiritual characters.

Children's literature, especially in the context of the school library, offers a unique opportunity to bring children closer to historical and spiritual figures, combining the legacy of oral tradition with the creative power of children's imagination. These narratives play a central role in preserving cultural memory and shaping children's identity, while also providing space for fantasy and spiritual reflection. The pedagogical exploration of stories about historical and spiritual figures thus allows for the articulation between historical knowledge, creative imagination, and ethical and spiritual development.

The transmission of a people's history and culture often occurs through traditional oral narratives and their written versions that portray significant historical figures. Traditional tales and contemporary adaptations reintroduce figures such as national heroes, spiritual leaders, and popular sages, preserving them in the collective memory. Traditional tales, by recreating historical events or legends associated with real figures, help children situate themselves within their own culture and history, developing a sense of belonging and temporal continuity (Guo, 2018).

The use of traditional tales, often featuring historical figures, does not mean a mere factual transmission, but rather a symbolic recreation where heroism, justice, and wisdom take on mythical contours. This fusion between history and myth is an essential characteristic of the narrative heritage of various cultures, which includes figures such as wise kings, liberating warriors, or visionary spiritual leaders (Rakhmanov, 2020).

Children's imagination not only benefits but thrives in narrative environments where the real and the fantastic intertwine (Coelho, 2012). When spiritual figures, such as saints, mystics, shamans, or prophets, appear in children's stories, their presence is often marked by supernatural or miraculous events. This fusion between the spiritual and the fantastic helps to stimulate children's curiosity and introduce reflections on spiritual and ethical values, without the doctrinal rigidity of more dogmatic approaches.

In many cases, the spiritual figure itself is shaped and reinvented by the popular imagination, acquiring traits of closeness to the children's audience, as happens with stories about animal protector saints, healers endowed with magical gifts, or spiritual figures that dialogue with elements of nature. This creative appropriation brings children closer to spirituality in an accessible and engaging way (Acquaviva, 2018).

It should be noted that the distinction between real historical figures and fictional or spiritual characters is, for children, a gradual process influenced by the cultural context. For example, Davoodi et al. (2016) demonstrate that children exposed to religious and spiritual narratives tend to conceive of supernatural figures as real, while children from more secular environments are more likely to identify these figures as fictional, which reveals the plasticity of the child's mind in the face of the intersection between historical reality and spiritual fantasy.

In children's and young adult stories, this ambiguity between the real and the imaginary is often used as a pedagogical strategy. Children are invited to explore the boundaries between the possible and the fantastic, simultaneously developing critical thinking and creativity. By analyzing the behavior of historical figures, they can reflect on values such as courage or justice; by imagining the actions of spiritual figures, they come into contact with notions such as compassion, altruism, and respect for nature (Trisciuzzi, 2017). Another relevant aspect is the growing production of hybrid tales, in which real historical figures are reimagined through fantastic or spiritual elements. This practice is not new – from medieval hagiography to national legends, history has always been permeated by fantasy (Guerreiro, 1978; Rocha, 1984) – but it has gained more

visibility in contemporary children's literature. In these stories, kings become sorcerers, saints communicate with animals, and historical heroes are guided by ancestral spirits. These hybrid tales offer a reading experience in which history and imagination merge (Beveridge, 2016). This intertwining is particularly evident in cultures where orality and spirituality intertwine in an inseparable way, as in the case of African and Asian cultures, where healers and spiritual leaders are portrayed as liminal figures, between the human and the divine (Acquaviva, 2018).

In the context of the school library, the exploration of stories with historical and spiritual figures can take many forms: guided reading, dramatization, philosophical debate, and even the collective creation of new stories inspired by historical and spiritual characters. This active and creative approach allows children not only to learn about these figures, but also to reinvent and question them, developing a critical and creative relationship with their cultural and spiritual heritage (Poskakalova, 2023). By integrating illustration activities, the creation of digital books, or shadow theater, the library becomes a space for experimentation where tradition and imagination dialogue, allowing children to creatively appropriate their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Thus, the exploration of stories with historical and spiritual figures in the school library can constitute a bridge between the past and the present, between tradition and imagination, between ethical reflection and artistic creation. This interdisciplinary approach fosters not only children's historical and cultural knowledge, but also the development of their creativity, critical thinking, and spiritual sensitivity.

4. Stories about Father Himalaya in the School Library

The figure of Manuel António Gomes, better known as Father Himalaya, is one of the most fascinating historical and scientific personalities in Portuguese history. An inventor, scientist, and pioneer in the field of solar energy at the beginning of the 20th century, Father Himalaya's biography combines elements of scientific curiosity, spirituality, and commitment to the common good. The Portuguese professor, Jacinto Rodrigues, in his work "The Solar Conspiracy of Father Himalaya," presents the true life and work of this figure. Exploring his life and work through children's stories in the school library represents an educational opportunity, combining the preservation of historical memory, the promotion of creativity, and the transmission of ethical and spiritual values. This

literary and pedagogical approach is part of a contemporary perspective that values the use of narratives about historical figures to foster meaningful learning in a school context.

Studies such as that of Apriliya et al. (2019) highlight the positive impact of introducing local historical and cultural figures into the school curriculum, especially through storytelling activities. Furthermore, incorporating local historical figures into children's and young adult stories fosters the construction of cultural identity and encourages an emotional connection with the territory, fundamental aspects for the development of critical citizenship. These characters help children understand their historical and cultural context, reinforcing their sense of belonging to the community and stimulating historical curiosity.

In the case of Father Himalaya, his connection to science and spirituality allows for the construction of narratives where scientific research interacts with ethical values and environmental preservation, themes of high relevance to current education. Exploring his life and work through literary fiction allows children to see him not only as a distant inventor, but as a living character, with dreams, dilemmas, and challenges that intersect with their own questions and curiosities.

The uniqueness of Father Himalaya lies in the combination of his scientific vocation and his spiritual dimension, traits that make his figure especially fertile for the creation of children's stories, corresponding to the conceptions of D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018) on storytelling in a school context, which demonstrates that the presence of complex characters, endowed with multiple facets (human, scientific, ethical and spiritual) enriches the narrative experience of children and broadens their interpretative horizon.

The biography of Father Himalaya, which combines an almost mystical passion for the sun with a tireless pursuit of scientific knowledge, allows for the construction of stories where scientific curiosity is presented as a form of admiration and respect for the natural world, promoting an ecological spirituality and an ethic of care for the planet, in a perspective consistent with pedagogical approaches that value children's literature as a vehicle for environmental awareness and the promotion of ecological consciousness (Pulimeno et al., 2020).

The use of stories about Father Himalaya in the school library can be organized around guided reading sessions, in which listening to the narrative is complemented by debate and critical reflection activities. As Sim (2017) points out, the use of stories inspired by real figures promotes the development of critical thinking, since children are encouraged to question the choices, dilemmas, and motivations of the characters. In the case of Father Himalaya, his perseverance in developing solar technology at a time when dependence on fossil fuels was dominant offers several opportunities for critical debates about sustainability, innovation, and scientific ethics. By reflecting on his inventions and the obstacles he faced, children are challenged to think about the values that guide scientific research and technological progress, fostering a critical and ethical awareness from childhood.

Beyond its critical dimension, exploring stories about Father Himalaya can be a powerful tool for stimulating children's creativity. Recent scientific literature highlights the pedagogical value of the collective creation of stories, in which children are invited to imagine unprecedented episodes from the lives of historical figures, inventing dialogues, adventures, and future inventions (Valenti & Antonietti, 2020). In the school library, this practice can be implemented through creative writing workshops, shadow puppetry, or collaborative illustration, where children freely reconstruct episodes from Father Himalaya's childhood or adult life. These activities combine the creative appropriation of historical heritage with the development of narrative and expressive skills, fundamental for critical and aesthetic literacy.

The figure of Father Himalaya is not only a model of scientific curiosity, but also an example of ethical and spiritual commitment. His concern for the sustainable use of energy, his connection to nature, and his vision of progress in service of the common good reflect values of solidarity, responsibility, and respect for creation, which can be worked on with children through the exploration of stories based on his life and work (Ateequ, 2015). These values can be explored in collective reflection activities, where children identify parallels between the challenges faced by Father Himalaya and the contemporary challenges of sustainability and climate justice. By integrating the exploration of these stories, the school library can be transformed into a space for education for global citizenship, where historical memory and environmental awareness converge in the same educational narrative.

Thus, exploring stories about Father Himalaya in the school library can constitute an innovative pedagogical strategy that combines historical knowledge with the promotion of creativity, critical thinking, and ethical and spiritual awareness. By revisiting the figure of Father Himalaya through children's imagination, children discover an inspiring model of curiosity, perseverance, and commitment to the common good, simultaneously enriching their cultural, literary, and ethical repertoire.

The literature review indicates that children's stories are a relevant resource for fostering critical thinking and creativity and for transmitting ethical, cultural, and spiritual values. The systematic exploration of these narratives in a school environment proves to be even more relevant when focused on characters that evoke historical or spiritual figures, as it enhances the formation of an identity and social awareness in children. The studies discussed emphasize the importance of integrating these stories into pedagogical activities that stimulate debate, dramatization, and the creation of alternative endings, contributing to the exercise of critical reasoning, imagination, and ethical reflection.

These assumptions motivated the definition of a research question that guided the present study: "To what extent does the reading and exploration of children's stories with historical or spiritual characters in the school library foster the development of critical thinking and creativity in children?" In articulation, two hypotheses were defined:

H1: The pedagogical exploration of children's stories with historical and spiritual figures in the school library fosters the development of children's critical thinking.

H2: The integration of children's stories with historical and spiritual figures into reading programs and cultural activities promoted in the school library fosters children's creativity.

In accordance with the initial question and the formulated hypotheses, the general objective was defined as: to understand the potential of reading and exploration activities, in the school library, of children's stories with historical or spiritual characters for the development of critical thinking and creativity in children. In conjunction, the following specific objectives were defined:

- To foster the development of critical thinking and creativity in children.

- To promote the transmission of ethical, cultural, and spiritual values through the exploration of children's stories with historical and spiritual characters.
- To foster children's reading and comprehension skills.
- To promote children's cultural identity.
- To design and implement reading programs and cultural activities based on texts with historical and spiritual characters.

Based on the research question and defined objectives, and to test the stated hypotheses, an empirical study was developed with teachers from a group of schools, with a view to understanding the dynamics that emerge from the use of children's stories as a pedagogical tool for the integral development of children, with an emphasis on fostering their critical thinking and creativity.

5. Method

5.1. *Participants*

The sample for this qualitative study consisted of 7 teachers from a school cluster in Northern Portugal. The inclusion criterion was that teachers who had attended a workshop on “Children's Stories as a Bridge Between Tradition and Imagination: Father Himalaya as a Symbol of Spirituality, Wisdom, and Tradition” were selected. This sample was chosen for convenience, given the participants' direct interest in the topic and their willingness to participate in the research.

Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, the majority of participants fall within the age range of 40-50 years ($n=3$) and 50 or more ($n=3$), with only one individual in the 30-40 age range ($n=1$). As for gender, 2 participants (29%) identify as male and 4 (57%) as female; in 1 case (14%), it was not possible to determine the sex due to omission of response. Regarding academic qualifications, 6 teachers (86%) state that they hold a bachelor's degree and 1 (14%) holds a master's degree.

5.2. *Instruments and Procedures*

Following the workshop “Children's Stories as a Bridge Between Tradition and Imagination: Father Himalaya as a Symbol of Spirituality, Wisdom, and Tradition,” a questionnaire was administered to collect and analyze the perceptions of participating teachers regarding the potential of reading and exploration activities in the school library, using children's stories with historical or spiritual characters, for the development of critical thinking and creativity in children. This questionnaire consisted of 9 closed-ended questions, including items on the inclusion of historical and spiritual characters, the benefits observed in students, the impact of reading activities in the library, and the relevance of complementary cultural activities. No formal assessment of internal consistency or statistical validity was performed, given that this was an exploratory instrument within a small-scale project.

Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously and confidentially, in paper format. The overall objective of the study was explained, and they were assured that the data would be used exclusively for scientific research purposes. After collection, the questionnaires were organized in digital format, and descriptive statistical analysis of the results was performed in accordance with informed consent and applicable data protection legislation.

5.3. *Results*

In total, 7 complete responses were obtained to the administered questionnaire. Given the small sample size, it was decided to present the results through descriptive statistics (absolute and percentage frequencies) and qualitative content analysis of the responses.

When asked about the relevance of including historical and spiritual figures in children's stories, all respondents (n=7, 100%) rated this inclusion as "very important," with no other responses recorded.

Regarding the benefits observed in students based on reading and exploring children's stories, with participants able to select more than one option, the majority (n=4, 57%) consider that improvements in text comprehension, development of moral values, and increased interest in reading occur simultaneously. Two participants (29%) specifically mention improved text comprehension and increased interest in reading as significant benefits, and 3 (43%) highlight the development of moral values more prominently.

Asked about the need to include cultural activities that complement reading, all 7 respondents (100%) answered affirmatively to this possibility, which reveals a consensus about the pedagogical value of interdisciplinary proposals in the school library.

All participants (n=7, 100%) rate the impact of reading activities on the overall development of students as "very important," highlighting their relevance in children's educational journey. Equally unanimously (n=7, 100%), they indicate that the pedagogical exploration of children's stories in the school library fosters the development of students' critical thinking and creativity in a "very important" way.

Finally, all teachers (n=7, 100%) state that they "fully agree" that exploring the life and work of Father Himalaya can be a suitable resource for working with stories of a more spiritual and humanistic nature. These results confirm the interest and receptiveness of teachers to pedagogical proposals that integrate historical and spiritual figures into the development of reading and reflection activities in the school library.

6. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the teachers who participated in the workshop on "Children's Stories as a Bridge Between Tradition and Imagination: Father Himalaya as a Symbol of Spirituality, Wisdom, and Tradition" unanimously recognize the relevance of including historical and spiritual characters in children's stories and acknowledge their potential to foster the development of critical thinking and creativity in children. This perception aligns with the scientific literature, which highlights the role of children's stories in mobilizing reflective and creative skills (Borisová & Pintes, 2023; Linares, 2022).

All participants (100%) also emphasize the importance of reading activities in the school library to promote holistic learning, which corroborates studies that highlight the crucial role of the library as a meeting space between play, culture, and education (Sim, 2017).

All respondents agree that the figure of Father Himalaya is suitable for working with stories of a spiritual and humanistic nature, a fact that reinforces the perspective of Apriliya et al. (2019) on the impact of local historical and cultural figures in strengthening collective identity and developing historical curiosity. At the same time, the unanimity of the participants regarding the relevance of complementary cultural activities indicates that teachers recognize the need to develop interdisciplinary pedagogical strategies in the school library (Poskakalova, 2023).

Interpreting the results, it is likely that the high valuation of historical and spiritual figures stems from the perception that these characters help contextualize central themes in children's education (Fard et al., 2016). Furthermore, the convergence between historical knowledge and ethical/spiritual reflection seems to motivate teachers to develop more integrated pedagogical practices, aligned with holistic education models (Alrashede, 2017). The fact that all respondents considered the exploration of children's stories "very important" in promoting critical thinking and creativity points to adherence to approaches that prioritize imagination and reflection, in line with theoretical perspectives that highlight the pedagogical power of narratives in the integral development of children (Vásquez & Ruiz-Pérez, 2021).

The data analysis indicates that the study's initial hypotheses appear to be confirmed:

H1: The pedagogical exploration of children's stories with historical and spiritual figures in the school library fosters the development of children's critical thinking. Participants clearly recognize this potential, validating the idea that discussing dilemmas and values inherent in the narratives stimulates the capacity for reflection.

H2: The integration of children's stories with historical and spiritual figures into reading programs and cultural activities promoted in the school library fosters children's creativity. The results indicate that teachers value interdisciplinary and creative proposals, reinforcing the conviction that creativity gains momentum when children are challenged to imagine scenarios and narrative solutions (Kurniatin & Aryani, 2021).

Therefore, notwithstanding the small sample size, this study seems to indicate that there is a favorable consensus for the adoption of pedagogical strategies based on children's stories, especially when these involve historical and spiritual characters. The teachers surveyed seem to recognize that these literary resources enhance the transmission of ethical, cultural, and spiritual values, as well as stimulating creativity and critical thinking. Thus, this work contributes to the consolidation of practices that recover historical, scientific, and cultural heritage, while also responding to contemporary educational challenges.

As a main contribution of this research, its practical approach stands out, as it analyzes the perceptions of teachers actually involved in a workshop related to the topic under study. This proximity to the school reality enriches the conclusions, making them more applicable in other educational contexts. However, the small sample size limits the generalization of the results, and the exploratory nature of the questionnaire and the absence of in-depth statistical validation must also be considered.

The results of the study support concrete pedagogical applications, namely the implementation of reading and storytelling programs centered on historical and spiritual figures and the development of cultural activities that allow children to recreate narratives, dramatize them, or reinvent them together. For future studies, it is recommended to expand the sample, including both teachers and students, in order to assess in more detail the real impact of children's stories on the development of critical thinking, creativity, and ethical formation. It would also be relevant to incorporate research methodologies using different data collection instruments and different analysis techniques, combining validated questionnaires with observation grids of practices in the classroom or library.

In short, the results corroborate the idea that children's stories, when associated with historical and spiritual figures, constitute an effective instrument to promote fundamental skills in children's development and to bring the school universe closer to its cultural and spiritual roots. This finding reinforces the relevance of investing in proposals that combine tradition with imagination, highlighting the potential of the school library as a space for integral education and appreciation of collective heritage.

REFERENCES

- Acquaviva, G. (2018). Healing and spirituality: The *mganga* figure between literature, myths and beliefs. *Kervan: International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 22.
<https://ojs.unito.it/index.php/kervan/article/download/2872/pdf>
- Alrashede, F. (2017). The impact of religious and social children's stories on developing creative thinking skills of pre-school children, Al Qaseem Zone - Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Talent Development*, 8(1), 3-25. <https://doi.org/10.20428/IJTD.8.1.1>
- Apriliya, S., Sunendar, D., Mulyati, Y., & S., S. (2019). How do elementary school teachers teach children to appreciate stories? In *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Education, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICESSHum 2019)*.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/ICESSHUM-19.2019.135>
- Ateequ, S. I. (2017). Using children's literature in the teaching of moral education in Nigerian primary schools. *Journal of Applied Information Science and Technology*, 11(2). <https://globalacademicgroup.com/journals/knowledge%20review/Ibrahim.pdf>
- Araújo, A. F. F., Azevedo, F. & Araújo, J. M. (2013). Educação, cultura e imaginário. Lulu Enterprises.
- Azevedo, F. (2011). Palavras e imagens que permitem interrogar o mundo. In F. Azevedo et al. (Coords.), *Globalização na literatura infantil: Vozes, rostos e imagens* (pp. 45-54). Lulu.
- Azevedo, F. F. (2010). Da luta entre o bem e o mal, as crianças são sempre vencedoras. In F. Azevedo (Coord.), *Infância, memória e imaginário: Ensaio sobre literatura infantil e juvenil* (pp. 11-29). Universidade do Minho, Centro de Investigação em Formação de Profissionais de Educação da Criança.
- Balakrishnan, V., & Thambu, N. (2017). Using moral and ethical stories to inculcate values among preschoolers. *International Journal for Studies on Children, Women, Elderly and Disabled*, 2(6), 8-15. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317659918>
- Bastos, G. (1999). *Literatura Infantil e Juvenil*. Universidade Aberta.
- Borisová, S., & Pintes, G. (2023). The philosophical literary story as a model of critical thinking. *Education & Self Development*. <https://doi.org/10.26907/esd.18.1.05>
- Coelho, N. N. (2012). *O Conto de Fadas - Símbolos, Mitos, Arquétipos*. Paulinas.

Davoodi, T., Corriveau, K. H., & Harris, P. L. (2016). Distinguishing between realistic and fantastical figures in Iran. *Developmental Psychology*, 52(2), 221-231. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000079>

D'Olimpio, L., & Peterson, A. (2018). The ethics of narrative art: Philosophy in schools, compassion and learning from stories. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, 5(1). https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=phil_article

Faizin, F., & Helandri, J. (2023). The use of Islamic stories as a moral education media for early childhood. *Bouseik: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 1(2), 91-99. <https://www.jurnal.staibslg.ac.id/index.php/bouseik/article/download/649/341>

Fard, F., Nasrabadi, H., & Heidari, M. (2016). Philosophy for children: Capacity evaluation of humorous stories in *Masnavi* based on Lipman's views on philosophical thinking components. *Educational Research Review*, 11, 1154-1160. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ERR2016.2649>

Gomes, J. A., Ramos, A. M., & Silva, S. R. (2009). Literatura portuguesa para a infância e promoção da multiculturalidade. *Malsartes*, 17, 18-23.

Guerreiro, M. V. (1978). Para a história da literatura popular portuguesa. Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa.

Guo, H. (2018, November). A study on the educational strategy of using folktales in kindergarten. In *2018 5th International Conference on Education, Management, Arts, Economics and Social Science (ICEMAESS 2018)* (pp. 748-751). Atlantis Press. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/25906295.pdf>

Humaira, H. W. (2018). Analysis of local wisdom in children's stories as an effort to introduce Indonesian culture to the international world. *Konferensi Internasional Kesastraan XXVII*, 310. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328138851>

Hoster Cabo, B., & Ruiz Campos, A. M. (2013). Valores en la literatura infantil actual. In S. Álvarez Ledo, C. Ferreira Boo, & M. Neira Rodríguez (Eds.), *De la literatura infantil a la promoción de la lectura* (pp. 68-91). CEU.

Ja'far, F., & Al-Ajeely, S. (2018, June). Cultural diversity values embedded in children's literature. In *Proceedings of International Academic Conferences* (No. 7208523). International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences. <https://iises.net/proceedings/36th->

[international-academic-conference-london/table-of-content/detail?cid=72&iid=020&rid=8523](https://doi.org/10.36418/edv.v1i8.150)

Kurniatin, S., & Aryani, R. (2021). Efforts to increase creativity in early children through picture story media. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies*, 1(8). <https://doi.org/10.36418/edv.v1i8.150>

Lee, S. C. (2014). C. S. Lewis' *mythopoeia* of heaven and earth: Implications for the ethical and spiritual formation of multicultural young learners. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 20(1), 15-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.999229>

Linares, W. (2022). Playful strategies for critical-creative thinking in five-year-old children. *Revista Innova Educación*. <https://doi.org/10.35622/j.rie.2022.03.011.en>

Lipman, M. (1977). *Philosophy in the Classroom*. IAPC.

Lipman, M. (1990). *A Filosofia vai á Escola*. Summus Editorial.

Mata-McMahon, J. (2019). Exploring connections between humor and children's spirituality. In *Research on Young Children's Humor: Theoretical and Practical Implications for Early Childhood Education* (pp. 223-241). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15202-4_13

Martins, M. J. D. (2013). Educação para os valores, desenvolvimento sociomoral e literatura infantojuvenil. *Aprender*, 33, 5-10. <https://doi.org/10.58041/aprender.84>

Muryanti, E., & Herman, Y. (2016). Building children's critical thinking by puzzle storytelling. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icece-16.2017.25>

Morgado, M. & Pires, M. N. (2010). *Educação intercultural e literatura infantil*. Edições Colibri.

Naldoniová, L. (2023). Philosophy and creativity with children: Lipman, Vygotsky, Rodari. *Ruch Filozoficzny*, 80(1), 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.12775/RF.2024.05>

Oliveira, M.A. (2008). *Dinâmicas de Literatura Infantil*. Edições Paulinas.

Oliveira, A. B. (2007). Estereótipos e imaginários: Ogres encantados ou príncipes desencantados? In F. Azevedo, J. M. Araújo, C. S. Pereira, & A. F. Araújo (Coords.), *Imaginário, identidades e margens: Estudos em torno da literatura infantojuvenil* (pp. 428-438). Gailivro.

Poskakalova, T. (2023). Digital storytelling as a means of education and formation of spiritual and ethical values in adolescence (on the base of classic literature material). *Психологическая наука и образование*. https://psyjournals.ru/en/journals/pse/archive/2023_n4/pse_2023_n4_Poskakalova_en.pdf

Pulimeno, M., Piscitelli, P., & Colazzo, S. (2020). Children's literature to promote students' global development and wellbeing. *Health Promotion Perspectives*, 10(1), 13. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7036210/pdf/hpp-10-13.pdf>

Ramos, A. M. (2012). Tendências contemporâneas da literatura portuguesa para a infância e juventude. Tropelias & Companhia.

Rakhmanov, B. (2020). Present of traditional tales living forms. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, 6(11), 262-267. <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra4878>

Roberts, B. (2016). Children into swans: Fairy tales and the pagan imagination. *Mythlore*, 34, 186. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.189589>

Rocha, N. (1984). Breve História da Literatura para Crianças em Portugal. Instituto da Cultura e Língua Portuguesa.

Rodari, G. (2017). Gramática da fantasia: introdução à arte de contar histórias.

Faktoria K dos Livros.

Rodrigues, J. (1999). A Conspiração Solar do Padre Himalaya- Esboço biográfico dum português pioneiro da Ecologia. Porto: Campo das Letras.

Sim, H. H. (2017). Using stories for teaching primary social studies. *HSSE Online*, 6(2), 64-78. <https://repository.nie.edu.sg/server/api/core/bitstreams/7e60800b-d928-4cac-a5f5-c7561e42e973/content>

Traça, M. E. (1998). O Fio da Memória. Do Conto Popular ao Conto para Crianças. Porto Editora.

Valenti, C., & Antonietti, A. (2020). Short stories for high goals: The “Creativity in the Classroom” program. In *Enhancing Creativity Through Storytelling: Innovative Training Programs for School Settings* (pp. 15-45). https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-63013-3_2