Religious and Social Influences as a Critical Factor in Selecting Children’s Books by Religious Preschool Teachers / Dr. Yael Segev

Book reading during childhood greatly contributes to the cognitive, emotional, and linguistic development of children. Books are read out loud to preschoolers on a daily basis, by teachers of all sectors.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Children’s literature holds great potential; in order to realize it, preschoolers require the mediation of their teachers. Preschool teachers must therefore be instilled with a perception that recognizes the poetic and emotional qualities of children’s literature, rather than view it as merely a didactic tool or an artistic byproduct.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Public-religious schooling, by definition of Israeli law, is considered public for all intents and purposes, and as such is committed to the cultural and moral values modeled by the Israeli Ministry of Education. The nature of its educational themes and contents, however, is religious. The hypothesis was that often, when choosing books to be read out loud, the preschool teacher will experience a clash between aesthetic-poetic criteria and moral-didactic ones. This may be the case with a book that is deemed poetically “good”, yet depicts children behaving improperly towards adults, or with a children’s book that is commonly perceived as “high-standing” but will include images of immodestly dressed, or even kissing, children. When such a clash occurs, the religious teacher is likely to choose the book that corresponds with the didactic-moral criteria, that is, correlating with the values of the class and the teacher, or one that holds a fitting didactic message – even if it is inferior, from a literary perspective.

The study employed a mixed methodology: qualitative and quantitative research.

Questionnaires developed specifically for the purpose of the study were the research tool.

The goal of this study was to examine the criteria according to which a religious preschool teacher chooses books for her pupils.

The study was conducted using questionnaires distributed to 37 preschool teachers in the public-religious educational system, in various towns across Israel.

Findings revealed that children’s literature is perceived by all teachers as a readily-available source for teaching religious topics, holidays and seasons, for instilling morals and as a means of introducing Hebrew culture.[[3]](#footnote-3) It appears that the aesthetic-poetic criteria—that is, the linguistic quality, quality of illustrations, and plot—are low on the teacher’s list of priorities. Findings reveal the importance of focusing the preschool teacher training program on establishing knowledge of children’s literature, and the need to continue pursuing the professional literary development of religious preschool teachers.

1. [Cheatham, G.A](http://search.proquest.com.mgs.orot.ac.il/literature/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Cheatham%2C%2BGregory%2BA/%24N?accountid=13012) & [Jimenez-Silva, M.](http://search.proquest.com.mgs.orot.ac.il/literature/indexinglinkhandler/sng/au/Jimenez-Silva%2C%2BMargarita/%24N?accountid=13012) (2011). What makes a good story? Supporting oral narratives of young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds*.*[***Childhood Educatio*n**](http://search.proquest.com.mgs.orot.ac.il/literature/pubidlinkhandler/sng/pubtitle/Childhood%2BEducation/%24N/41055/DocView/866565307/abstract/66AA513951A547E4PQ/26?accountid=13012)[, **87**(4)](http://search.proquest.com.mgs.orot.ac.il/literature/indexingvolumeissuelinkhandler/41055/Childhood%2BEducation/02011Y07Y01%2423Summer%2B2011%243b%2B%2BVol.%2B87%2B%24284%2429/87/4?accountid=13012)261-268; Aram, D. (2005). Joint storybook reading and joint writing interventions among SES preschoolers: Differential contributions to early literacy**.** *Early Childhood Research Quarterly***,** **19**(4), 588-610 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reese, E., Cox, A., Harte, D., & McAnally, H. (2003). Diversity in adults’ styles of reading books to children. In: A. van Kleeck, S.A. Stahl & E.B. Bauer (Eds.), *on reading books to children*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. Ch. 3, 37-57*n* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lehman-Elkad, Ilana (2009). “The Way in which A Preschool Teacher Exposes Her Students to Literature is the Way in which She Connects with the Material”, Children and Youth Literature, 130: 15-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)