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## **He That Would Eat the Kernel Must Crack the Nut: Older Preschoolers' Ability to Understand the Moral Idea of the Proverb**

**Czym skorupka za młodu nasiąknie, tym na starość  
trąci: zdolność dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym  
do rozumienia moralnego przesłania przysłów**

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## Introduction

In the words of Vasiliauskas (2006), a researcher of the ethnic pedagogy of the Lithuanian nation, scientific pedagogy does not invent or discover new ways of involving people in society, principles, methods, or means of education, but rather continues the educational ideas and experience that have been formed in the past from the cultural tradition. According to the aforementioned scientist (*ibid.*), if we consider folklore as the wisdom of the nation, then this wisdom is most succinctly expressed by proverbs, which, reflecting the social, ethical, and pedagogical experience accumulated over centuries in the course of history, have become a unique code of the nation's spirit, and their didacticism penetrated the child's consciousness with the concision of thought – the brevity of proverbs is compensated by the inner power of their thought. The purpose of proverbs, like oral folklore in general, is to act indirectly, they are characterised by an indirect, non-literal connection between what is said, what is said about, and for what purpose it is said (Zaikauskienė, 2021). With the power of their figurative language, proverbs not only teach, but also set the mood and make a great impression on the listener. However, contrary to straightforward educating and moralising, in order to influence the child's behaviour, the instruction expressed in the proverb does not make it difficult, it is to the point, easy to remember, and often very effective, because a moral demand is most effective when it touches the child's deeper feelings and makes him/her think. Having highlighted that proverbs were once an effective means of developing desirable character traits and sociability in children and of conveying moral and ethical values, Bučienė (2016), citing the Romanian paremiologist Dumitru Stanciu, who studied the educational significance of proverbs, draws attention to the argumentative evidence of this scholar that traditional pedagogy correlates with modern pedagogy, therefore, proverbs should remain as a means of education in modern society as well (both in the family and at school). She also calls the situation paradoxical that the fundamental question of this issue – the child's own reaction to proverbs – remains on the sidelines of the scientific field of view.

According to the most famous Lithuanian paremiologist Grigas (1968), proverbs are traditional generalising sayings of ancient origin, they are picturesque, rhythmic, and have the rudiments of poetry, and in the context of folklore, they are distinguished by their unique metaphorical expression. Metaphoricity is a very important feature of proverbs, because Lithuanian

proverbs, like those of many other nations, are often based entirely or at least partially on metaphor (Černiauskaitė, 2005). As Paola, Domaneschi, & Pouscoulous (2020) note, metaphor comprehension is a complex process relying on multiple cognitive abilities, therefore, metaphor understanding is traditionally thought to emerge late in childhood. Although recent findings suggest that even preschoolers can understand metaphor in more age-appropriate paradigms. The research by Zhu & Gopnik (2023) suggests that young children possess an early-emerging capacity to understand and use complex nonliteral language. Moreover, metaphors may be a powerful cognitive tool that helps young children learn about the world around them. Białecka-Pikul (2003), in her analysis of how the preschool child understands metaphors established that we could treat the understanding of metaphors as an expression of a child's theory of mind. The results of the study by Veraksa & Yakupova (2014) show that metaphorical representation is an important form of the reflection of reality by children of pre-school age. Furthermore, a metaphor acts as a tool of cognitive activity in the middle- and senior-preschool-aged children. Referring to the stages of intellectual development in children defined by Piaget, Malinauskienė (2011) explains that the beginnings of metaphorical thinking begin to form in early childhood – in the preoperational stage – and develops gradually from the most elementary forms, beginning with children's games. First of all, it manifests itself as a component of operational thinking, which is especially characteristic of children under three years of age. From the age of four, the elements of visual thinking begin to emerge, this is already the second form of metaphorical thinking. During this and subsequent periods of a child's development, metaphorical thinking, as a socio-cultural phenomenon of children's lives, acquires many meanings of the everyday environment. Children are characterised by the desire to transfer meanings from one phenomenon to another, to metaphorise them, by making the experience secret and encoding it with certain symbols, using certain methods of mystification.

However, to understand the proverb, that is, to decode it, as noted by Malinauskienė & Ramaneckienė (2004), one needs knowledge of ethnic culture, observation of natural phenomena, and experience of reflection. The aforementioned authors (*ibid.*) compare a proverb to a nut: the shell is the text of the proverb, and the kernel is the wisdom hidden in that text. The figurative 'shell' of a proverb is composed of literary devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, irony, and other forms of figurative language. Although these

devices contribute to the expressive and imaginative quality of the text, they may impede children's comprehension of the proverb's underlying meaning, making it difficult for them to access its conceptual 'kernel'. In addition, objects from the distant past, household observations and the concepts that name them are one of the reasons why a child has difficulties in understanding the lexical meaning and at the same time it becomes difficult to understand the didactic idea of the proverb.

Kalmykova, Kharchenko, & Mysan (2018; 2019) have proven through research that there are children with obvious intuitive language ability to feel the general meaning of proverbs. The proverb understanding is seen by the child as a complex cognitive task, which foresees decipherment of the common thought or conclusion, understanding its meaning (implication). Based on the analysis of the obtained empirical speech material and the revealed difficulties that children encounter when decoding the figurative meaning of proverbs, the aforementioned scholars predict the causes of the occurrence of these difficulties: insufficient cognitive abilities of children; poor vocabulary, which does not allow children to express the meaning of the proverb in their own words; limited life experience of children; the dominance of the visual-sensual impressions, life situations, and concrete-figurative thinking in children over the abstract and logical thinking; the lack of frequency in perception and use of proverbs by children in their own speech.

According to Gučienė (1989), in order to understand a proverb, a child must first well imagine and understand its literal meaning, and not all proverbs are equally difficult for children. According to the general principles of creating an artistic image, Lithuanian proverbs are divided into three main groups (Gučienė, 1989; Černiauskaitė, 2005):

- 1) directly understandable proverbs, where the moral idea is told without any allegories and metaphors, e.g.: *Live and learn* (*Kol gyveni, tol mokaisi*), *A faithful friend is better than gold* (*Geras draugas brangesnis už auksą*), *Beauty is only skin-deep; goodness goes to the bone* (*Gerumas vertingesnis už grožį*);
- 2) a proverb can be understood both literally and figuratively, e.g.: *Don't bite off more than you can chew* (*Daug apžiosi – mažai nukąsi*); *Everything is good when new, but friends when old* (*Geriausi rūbai nauji, geriausi draugai – seni*); *As you make your bed, so you will lie in it* (*Kaip pasiklosi, taip išmiegos*);

- 3) allegorical and metaphorical proverbs, understood in a figurative sense, e.g.: *To carry fire in one hand and water in the other* (*Akyse šilkas, už akių vilkas*); *In one ear and out the other* (*Pro vieną ausį įėjo, pro kitą išėjo*); *A diamond is valuable, though it lies on a dunghill* (*Auksas ir pelenuose žiba*).

Already a few decades ago, Gučienė (1989) noticed that proverbs used to flourish naturally in everyday spoken language, however, now the language of adults is significantly impoverished in this respect, therefore, in an effort to strengthen the vitality of this folklore genre, one should look for situations in which, while avoiding artificiality, an apt proverb could be used and thus speak to the child's heart. According to Zhu & Gopnik (2023), whose research has shown that preschool children not only understand metaphors, but can also learn from them, we would assume that it would be possible to combine the proverb with the content of the text being read to children and, using thinking questions, help children bite through the 'shell' of the proverb and taste the 'kernel', i.e., to understand the meaning of the proverb. Therefore, the aim of the research presented in this article is to find out how the discussion of the text read helps older preschoolers understand the moral idea of the proverb.

### **Data Collection Procedure, Participants, Method, and Ethics**

In combining the proverb with the content of the text being read, the study used dialogic reading of a literary work, when the child is included in the conversation (Table 1). Each child was read two short stories by Kęstutis Kasparavičius – 'Scary Story' and 'Mice and Monster' – at weekly intervals. The books of this contemporary children's book artist and writer have already become classics of Lithuanian children's books; they are included in the top 100 most important books for children in Lithuania. Both Kasparavičius' stories and their illustrations are created in a nonsensical style, which quickly attracts children's attention and arouses the desire to talk after listening to the story. The purpose of thinking questions is to help children better understand the causal relationships between events, because, according to Piaget (2002), for older preschoolers, the events themselves are more important than their consistency or the reasons that connect those events into a unified whole. Meanwhile, in our opinion, understanding the consistency and causality of events is very important in understanding the meaning of the proverb. However, in conversations, all of the child's answers/explanations are accepted

unconditionally, without commenting on them, and without trying to force the child to think from an adult's perspective.

**Table 1.** Sequence of matching the proverb with the content of the text being read

| <b>Scary Story</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Mice and Monster</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The child is shown the book from which the story will be read, the illustration of the story is viewed together, and the child is asked to guess what this story might be about.                                                                                                                                                                                                             | The child is shown the book from which the story will be read, the illustration of the story is viewed together, and the child is asked to guess what this story might be about.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| The child is asked: <i>How do you understand the saying 'Tikėk labiau akimis, ne ausimis' (literal translation – 'Believe more your eyes, not your ears'; English equivalent – 'The eyes believe themselves; the ears believe other people?')</i>                                                                                                                                            | The child is asked: <i>How do you understand the saying 'Iš tolo viskas baisu' (literal translation – 'Everything is scary from a distance'; English equivalent – 'Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is?')</i>                                                                                                                                                 |
| The story is read, the illustration is viewed again, it is discussed which part of the story was drawn by the artist.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | The story is read, the illustration is viewed again, it is discussed which part of the story was drawn by the artist.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| The child is asked thinking questions:<br>– Why did the tennis ball shout 'ugly monster!?' (...because he was scared of a fly.)<br>– Why did the basketball start screaming for everyone to save themselves? (...because he heard the football shouting 'Giant, horrible monster!')<br>– Why did the football shout? (...because he heard from the striped ball 'A huge, terrible monster!') | The child is asked thinking questions:<br>– Why did the vacuum cleaner look like a monster to the little mouse?<br>– What did the little mouse do when the monster was rampaging?<br>– When did the little mouse stop being afraid of the vacuum cleaner?<br>– Would it be possible to say to the little mouse that 'Everything is scary from a distance'? Why? |
| – Why was the striped ball scared? (...because the tennis ball screamed, 'Get out, you ugly monster!')<br>– If the basketball or the football saw a fly, would they be scared of it? Why do you think so?<br>– Would it be possible to say to the basketball or the football 'Believe more your eyes, not your ears'? Why?                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

**Source:** Authors' elaboration

The children's ability to understand the proverb was assessed twice: before reading, when there was no context for the proverb, and after reading, when the context of the proverb's use could already be clear to the children after thinking questions. The criteria for evaluating proverb comprehension are as follows: 3 points – the child understands the proverb and accurately explains its figurative meaning; 2 points – understands the figurative meaning of the proverb, but explains it only partially; 1 point – understands the proverb directly; 0 points – the child answers 'I don't know' or only repeats the words of the proverb verbatim. In order to test the effect of reading on understanding the meaning of the proverb, a paired t-test was used to summarise the responses of the children participating in the study. The binary logistic regression method was used to assess the effect of dialogic reading of a literary work on the perception of the metaphorical meaning of the proverb.

The study was conducted with each child individually, because, according to Piaget (2002), until about 7–8 years of age, children do not always strive to have the only opinion about something, they can succumb to the beliefs of others, switch from one point of view to another, forgetting their previous position. It was conducted in the 2024-2025 academic year in six preschool education institutions selected by convenience sampling in one of the largest cities of Lithuania.

The possibility of conducting the study was coordinated with the administration of the educational institution, written consents of the children's parents (guardians) were obtained to communicate with their children individually during the study and make an audio recording, as well as verbal consents of the children themselves. The study was based on the principle of benevolence, i.e., the researcher ensured the children an environment, in which they would not feel anxiety or fear; the children were spoken to in a respectful manner and without infringing on their privacy. The children (and their parents/guardians) were informed that participation in the study was a personal decision of the child, and the child could refuse to participate in the study at any time.

The study results, which are presented in accordance with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, illustrate the ability of 107 older preschoolers to understand the proverb, that is the number of children who agreed to participate in the reading activities of both stories (the responses of children who participated only once were eliminated from the study sample). All the

children in the study had typical development. One researcher collected and evaluated their responses across all institutions. The study complied with data protection rules: no personal information about the participating children was collected, and their names were changed when sharing the results. After analysing the data, the audio recordings were deleted.

## Results

### **Activity I: Older preschoolers' ability to understand a proverb when its moral idea is understood directly**

The moral idea of the proverb 'Believe more your eyes, not your ears' chosen by us for the story 'Scary Story' is stated directly, without any allegories and metaphors, therefore, it was expected that it would be easily understood by the children. However, as can be seen from the data summarised in Table 2, half of the older preschoolers who participated in this part of the study (49.5%) could not explain the aforementioned proverb before reading the story. Only a little less than a quarter of the children understood the figurative meaning of the proverb, e.g.: *'If someone says something happened and you didn't see it yourself, it might not be true'*; *'If you have only heard but not seen with your own eyes, then do not believe because you have to see to believe'*; *'This means that when someone says something, you shouldn't just believe their words, but you should see what you see with your own eyes. And when you see it, then you'll believe it. Or you won't believe it then'*; *'You shouldn't believe what someone says because you might get scared without seeing what's happening'*; or their understanding was close to the correct interpretation of the proverb, e.g.: *'Believe in what you see, because only that is real'*; *'When they say it, they might be lying'*; *'The ears only hear but do not see that it is wrong'*; *'In order not to be afraid, you need to see'*.

However, after reading the story, the percentage of the children's ability to understand the moral idea of the proverb increased (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Distribution of the children's ability to understand the moral idea of the proverb 'Believe more your eyes, not your ears' before and after reading the story (N = 107, %)

| Explanation is accurate |              | Explanation is close to the correct interpretation of the proverb |              | Trying to explain by repeating the words of the proverb |              | No explanation |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Before</i>           | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>                                                     | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>                                           | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>  | <i>After</i> |
| 6.5                     | 17.8         | 15                                                                | 20           | 29                                                      | 35.5         | 49.5           | 22           |

**Source:** Authors' elaboration

It can be said that the content of the story read helped some of the children understand the proverb, the moral idea of which is told without allegories and metaphors. Nevertheless, it was noticed that 5 (4.7%) children explained the meaning of the proverb very precisely before reading, i.e.: *This means that when someone says something, you shouldn't just believe their words, but you should see what you see with your own eyes. And when you see it, then you'll believe it. Or you won't believe it then* (Emilis); *If someone says they're going to give you a toy, but you can't see it, they might be talking wrong! But if you see that the person is actually giving you the toy, then you know it's true. It's like seeing with your own eyes what people actually do instead of just hearing what they say* (Titas); *I think that saying means that you should trust what you see, because the eyes show the real truth. Words can lie* (Olivija); *Listen less to what others say, you have to see, then believe* (Gabrielè); *You have to see it with your own eyes, then believe it* (Motiejus).

However, after reading the story, when asked if it would be possible to say to the basketball or the football 'Believe more your eyes, not your ears' and why, these children seem to reorient themselves to the real environment: *It wouldn't be possible, because only humans can use their eyes and ears to understand the world and say what to believe. A ball is just a hard object that we play with, but it doesn't understand things like we do!* (Emilis); *No, you can't say such things to a basketball or a football because it has no eyes, ears, or head!* (Titas); *No. The ball just rolls and flies, but it can't see or hear* (Olivija); *No, it's not possible, because they [balls] can't see or hear* (Gabrielè); *Of course not. You can tell people, but you can't tell balls* (Motiejus).

We would assume that these children have strong directed (*dirigée*), or rational, thinking, which, according to Piaget (2002), is conscious and adapted to reality. Therefore, most likely, the beginning of the question ‘would it be possible to say to the basketball or the football’ directed the children’s thoughts from the balls anthropomorphised in the story to those with which in reality one can only play, not talk.

The results of the paired t-test revealed that after reading the story, the mean of the estimates of the children’s correct interpretations of the meaning of the proverb was higher ( $M = 1.23$ ;  $SD = 1.129$ ) than before reading ( $M = 0.79$ ;  $SD = 0.932$ ). Since a statistically significant difference between the mean of the estimates of the correct answers of the children studied before and after reading was found ( $p = 0.000$ ) (Table 4), it can be stated that reading and discussing the story had an impact on the perception of the meaning of the proverb.

**Table 3.** Means of the estimates of the children’s ability to understand the directly stated moral idea of the proverb

| Paired Samples Test |                                         |                     |                    |                                                 |       |       |       |     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----------------|
| Mean                |                                         | Paired Differences  |                    |                                                 |       |       | t     | Df  | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|                     |                                         | Std. Devia-<br>tion | Std. Error<br>Mean | 95% Confidence<br>Interval of<br>the Difference |       |       |       |     |                 |
|                     |                                         |                     |                    | Lower                                           | Upper |       |       |     |                 |
| Pair<br>1           | Before<br>reading<br>– After<br>reading | -.449               | 1.135              | .110                                            | -.666 | -.231 | -4.09 | 106 | .000            |

**Source:** Authors’ elaboration

### **Activity II: Older preschoolers’ ability to understand a proverb when its moral idea is understood figuratively**

The moral of the proverb we chose for the story “Mice and Monster” – ‘Everything is scary from a distance’ – is understood figuratively, i.e., what is unfamiliar or unknown is frightening. As it can be seen from the data summarised in Table 4, more than half of the older preschoolers participating in this part of the study did not even explain or could not explain the idea

of the proverb either before or after reading the story (58.9% and 51.4%, respectively), e.g.: *'I don't know what it could mean'; 'I don't know such a saying'; 'You tell me, I don't know maybe'; 'I don't know. I'm also scared of how it will be at school'; 'The little mouse has a skirt, like mine. Very beautiful. And she wasn't afraid'; 'It is possible to hide if it is far away'; 'If I were told that, I would have said, what does that mean?'; 'The big vacuum cleaner is far away, and the mouse is small'.*

**Table 4.** Distribution of the children's ability to understand the figurative meaning of the proverb 'Everything is scary from a distance' before and after reading the story (N = 107, %)

| Explanation is accurate |              | Explanation is close to the correct interpretation of the proverb |              | Trying to explain by repeating the words of the proverb |              | No explanation |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Before</i>           | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>                                                     | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>                                           | <i>After</i> | <i>Before</i>  | <i>After</i> |
| 1.9                     | 2.8          | 8.4                                                               | 14.9         | 30.8                                                    | 29           | 58.9           | 51.4         |

**Source:** Authors' elaboration

A third of the older preschoolers who participated in this activity tried to explain the proverb by repeating its words, both before and after reading the story, e.g.: *'You don't know or see what's far away, so you're afraid. But when you get closer, you're no longer afraid'; 'But when I go there far away, I'm scared because I don't know those people'; 'Why? Well, from afar, it's far, well, you can't see. Maybe it's scary. But when you see it, it's not scary anymore'; 'What is far away is scary'; 'It seems from afar that everything is scary, but everything is different'; 'It's scary from afar because you can't see'; 'From a distance it looks bigger and scarier. When you get closer, you see something not scary'; 'When you are far away, everything seems scary'; 'We don't know what is there, far away'.*

Less than a quarter of the children, even after reading the story, understood the proverb only close to its correct interpretation, e.g.: *'This means that when you can't see the whole thing, it looks scary. But when you get closer, it's not so scary anymore'; 'You can't see it from a distance, which can be scary. But when you see it up close, it's not scary anymore'; 'When it's far away, it looks scary. When you get closer, you see that it's not what you thought'; 'If you see something scary from afar, it's not scary up close. Because you know what's there when*

*you're close; 'From a distance, the vacuum cleaner looked very big and scary, but up close it was not dangerous at all'.*

Only a few older preschoolers understood the moral of the proverb 'Everything is scary from a distance' accurately before and after reading the story, e.g.: *'It means you need to find out what it is, then you won't be afraid'; 'Sometimes you don't know what's going on, it gets scary'; 'The little mouse didn't see the whole truth, she thought the vacuum cleaner might eat her. But later she realised that it was just working'; 'The little mouse didn't know what it [the vacuum cleaner] was at first. When she found out who it was, she got calm'; 'There is no need to be afraid. You need to overcome fear'.*

However, in this activity, it was also observed that two children (1.9%) explained the meaning of the proverb very accurately before reading, i.e.: *It means you need to find out what it is, then you won't be afraid* (Emilis); *Sometimes you don't know what's going on, it gets scary* (Motiejus). After reading the story, as in the previous reading activity, they reorient themselves to the real environment again, i.e.: *It wouldn't be possible to say it to the mouse because she does not know our language* (Emilis); *No, because she [the mouse] is not afraid of anything, she is only afraid of people, that they will throw her out the window. And she will have no home* (Motiejus).

The results of the paired t-test revealed that after reading the story, the mean of the estimates of the children's correct interpretations of the meaning of the proverb was slightly higher ( $M = 0.65$ ;  $SD = 0.859$ ) than before reading ( $M = 0.53$ ;  $SD = 0.731$ ). However, this difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.074$ ) (Table 6). Nevertheless, we would think that older preschoolers, although experiencing difficulties, have the potential to understand the figurative meaning of proverbs as well.

**Table 5.** Evaluation of the impact of reading on the comprehension of the moral idea of a proverb told figuratively

|                | Paired Samples Statistics |      |                |                 |       |     |                 |
|----------------|---------------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|-------|-----|-----------------|
|                | N                         | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | t     | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Before reading | 107                       | .53  | .731           | .071            | -1.80 | 106 | .074            |
| After reading  | 107                       | .65  | .859           | .083            |       |     |                 |

**Source:** Authors' elaboration

In addition, when assessing the impact of dialogic reading of a literary work on understanding the metaphorical meaning of a proverb, the estimates of the group of children before reading a story to which a proverb with a literal meaning was applied were reduced to the values of *understood/did not understand*. The estimates of the proverb with a figurative meaning have not been reduced. Such data transformation was suitable for the logistic regression model: likelihood ratio criterion  $\chi^2 = 40.855$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.000$ . 90.7% of the subjects in the sample were classified correctly: those who did not understand the meaning of the proverb accounted for 96.4%; while those who understood it accounted for 69.6%.

Cox & Snell  $R^2 = 0.317$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.491$ . Both of these coefficients of determination indicate a good fit of the model to the data ( $R^2 > 0.2$ ). Wald test  $p = 0.000$ . Both Cook's and DfBeta coefficients are less than one. The logistic regression results revealed a good estimate of the odds ratio  $\text{Exp}(B) = 8.082$  between the lowest = 3.507 and highest = 18.628 confidence intervals. This odds ratio suggests that dialogic reading of a literary work enhances the understanding of metaphorical meaning.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The results of the presented study confirmed the conclusions of Kalmykova, Kharchenko, & Mysan (2018; 2019) that there are older preschoolers with an obvious intuitive language ability to sense the general meaning of proverbs. At the same time, it was found that reading and discussing the story had an impact on the children's ability to understand the proverb when its moral idea was understood directly: the difference in the means of the estimates of the correct answers of the children tested before and after reading was statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). When assessing the ability to understand the proverb that is understood figuratively, the results of the paired t-test showed that after reading the story, the mean of the estimates of the correct interpretations of the proverb by children was slightly higher ( $M = 0.65$ ;  $SD = 0.859$ ) than before reading ( $M = 0.53$ ;  $SD = 0.731$ ), however, this difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.074$ ). The estimate of the odds ratio shows that using dialogic reading of a literary work increases the perception of figurative meaning 8 times. On the other hand, we view this result with caution: the problem of multicollinearity in the logistic analysis model could not be avoided, because

these are data from the same subjects repeated over a certain time interval. Nevertheless, we would think that older preschoolers, although experiencing difficulties, have the potential to understand the figurative meaning of proverbs. We believe that it would be beneficial for a child to hear proverbs the figurative meaning of which he/she does not yet understand. Hearing them more often, the child will remember them, and in the future, after gaining more life experience, the deeper meaning of proverbs will open up. The process of understanding proverbs would also be accelerated by the teacher's quick reaction to use the proverb in a relevant everyday situation, only here it is necessary that the teacher's own language is rich in these folklore works.

Returning to the results of the presented study, we would think that the children might have been influenced by the fact that they were hearing the stories read in the activities for the first time, therefore, often the child, after moving on to the discussion, asked to read a certain part of the story or even the whole story again. As is known, only reading a text several times allows a child to immerse himself/herself in the images of the text being read and delve into the content of the text. Therefore, it is likely that if the children had heard the stories read several times, it would have been easier for them to understand and explain the circumstances of the events, cause and effect relationships, etc., which would have also made it easier to understand the moral idea of the proverb.

Another thing that was noticed in the research activities was that it was not easy for children to discuss the story using thinking questions. We would link this to the results of our previous study (Bražienė & Malinauskienė, 2023), showing that Lithuanian preschool education teachers lack knowledge about the child's literary education and practical skills on how to do it in a quality manner: teachers limit themselves to reading the text only, they do not think about how to involve children in reading. After reading the work, children are asked quite a lot of questions to find out whether the children understood the content of the text, what exactly they remember from the read text, but not encouraging them to analyse, consider, imagine, model situations, thus developing children's critical and creative thinking.

**Abstract:** The aim of the research presented in the article is to find out how discussion of the text read helps older preschoolers understand the moral idea of the proverb. In combining the proverb with the content of the text being read, the study used dialogic reading of a literary work, when the child is included in the conversation. The children's ability to understand the proverb was assessed twice – before reading when there is no context of the proverb and after reading when the context of using the proverb after thinking questions could already be clear to the children. In order to test the effect of reading on understanding the meaning of the proverb, a paired t-test was used to summarise the responses of the children participating in the study. Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that reading and discussing the story had an impact on the children's ability to understand a proverb when its moral idea is understood directly: the results of the paired t-test revealed that after reading the story, the mean of the estimates of the correct interpretations of the proverb by children was higher ( $M = 1.23$ ;  $SD = 1.129$ ) than before reading ( $M = 0.79$ ;  $SD = 0.932$ ), and the difference in the means of the estimates of these responses was statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). When assessing the ability to understand a proverb that is understood figuratively, the results of the paired t-test showed that after reading the story, the mean of the estimates of the correct interpretations of the proverb by children was slightly higher ( $M = 0.65$ ;  $SD = 0.859$ ) than before reading ( $M = 0.53$ ;  $SD = 0.731$ ), however, this difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.074$ ).

**Keywords:** older preschoolers, understanding of proverbs, metaphor, reading to children.

**Streszczenie:** Celem badania przedstawionego w artykule jest ustalenie, w jaki sposób omówienie przeczytanego tekstu pomaga dzieciom w wieku przedszkolnym zrozumieć moralne przesłanie przysłowia. Łącząc przysłowie z treścią przeczytanego tekstu, w badaniu zastosowano dialogowe czytanie utworu literackiego, w którym do rozmowy włącza się dziecko. Zdolność dzieci do zrozumienia przysłowia oceniono dwukrotnie: przed przeczytaniem opowiadania, kiedy nie było kontekstu przysłowia, oraz po przeczytaniu, kiedy kontekst użycia przysłowia po zadaniu pytań refleksyjnych mógł być już dla dzieci jasny. Aby sprawdzić wpływ czytania na rozumienie znaczenia przysłowia, do podsumowania odpowiedzi dzieci biorących udział w badaniu zastosowano kryterium t. Na podstawie uzyskanych wyników można stwierdzić, że czytanie i omawianie historii miało wpływ na zdolność dzieci do zrozumienia przysłowia, gdy jego przesłanie moralne dało się odczytać w sposób bezpośredni: wyniki testu t wykazały, że po przeczytaniu opowiadania średnia ocen dzieci za prawidłowe wyjaśnienie znaczenia przysłowia była wyższa ( $M = 1,23$ ;  $SD = 1,129$ ) niż przed przeczytaniem ( $M = 0,79$ ;  $SD = 0,932$ ), a różnica między średnimi ocenami tych odpowiedzi była statystycznie istotna ( $p = 0,000$ ). Przy ocenie zdolności odbioru przysłowia rozumianego

przenośnie, wyniki testu t wykazały, że po przeczytaniu opowiadania średnia ocen dzieci za prawidłowe wyjaśnienie przysłowia była nieco wyższa ( $M = 0,65$ ;  $SD = 0,859$ ) niż przed przeczytaniem ( $M = 0,53$ ;  $SD = 0,731$ ), ale różnica ta nie była statystycznie istotna ( $p = 0,074$ ).

**Słowa kluczowe:** dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym, rozumienie przysłów, metafora, czytanie dzieciom.

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