

The Effects of Lullabies on Children

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Abstract

One day a woman approaches a scholar and asks him : “When should I start educating my child ?” the scholar answers : “When will your child be born ?” the woman answers: “Born? It is already five years old!” The scholar is astonished and responds thus : “You have already lost five complete years!” As it can be understood from the story the education of a child starts in the womb of the mother already in the pre-natal period. In the due story it is pointed to the fact that child education starts in the mother’s womb. In ancient times mothers traditionally sang lullabies for their children and told them the happenings of the day with a harmonious style. This traditional activity has become so far a much different dimension. As a matter of fact science today has proved that babies perceive the external environment even when they are in their mother’s womb and are able to give reactions. It has even been proved that at further ages children perceive more effectively owing to the lullabies they heard in their infancy. Our ancestors without being aware handled in a way with this consciousness and tried to raise their children with this sensitivity. However in the circumstances of today mothers aren’t able to spare enough time for their children owing to the hard working conditions in their business life. After a tiring business tempo mothers come home very exhausted and are not in a condition either physically or psychologically to spend time with their children. Because of the hard conditions in the business life babies grow up away from their mother. This situation causes children to grow up away from the lullabies that are in fact extremely effective means of communication and education. Unfortunately this means not seeing or appreciating a present treasure purposefully.

Key Words: Child, Lullaby, Education in the Mother’s Womb

Folk literature products are like a toy box for children.
They can find new toys every time they put their hand in it.

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1-Lullaby

Lullabies are rhymed and harmonious words; in the form of poetry and prose according to a certain melody generally sung by mothers but sometimes also by relatives like grandma, aunt, elder sister etc. in order to soothe the crying children or make them sleep.¹

Lullabies, the first teller of which is anonymous, are usually sung by mothers in order to send their children to sleep. Mothers who are singing the lullabies in the form of ballads are thus transmitting them to their children by either rocking them in their bosom or on their legs via improvisation. A mother’s singing a lullaby while rocking her baby in a soft and harmonious tone is a tradition of our culture that has its roots in very ancient times. Within this tradition there is also the mother’s unique kind of managing her voice by softening, rising, hardening, fastening or slowing it just according to the situation of the child at that moment. In this way the mother is in fact directing her baby with the tone of her voice.

¹ Şükrü Elçin, Halk Edebiyatına Giriş, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 1986, p. 271.- Doğan Kaya, Anonim Halk Şiiri, Akçağ Yayınları. Ankara, 2004. p. 349-351.

Through the due direction the mother is providing for the baby a comfortable and compassionate condition in which it can fall asleep faster and more easily and she is also getting the baby soothed by minimizing the crying of it.²

Besides the voice of the mother the harmonious words within the lullaby affect the baby as well. In the essence of the mother's words, reflecting the feelings of herself just at that moment via improvisation, there are wishes of a mother's heart for her baby like health, a good destiny, growing up fast, being not a crying child, being a bride or bridegroom in the future and of course happiness. In addition to all these wishes lullabies are including local facts, customs and traditions and many historical and social subjects and issues as well.³

Even though the emerging date of lullabies within the Turkish Language isn't known for certain it is known for sure that the word lullaby is mentioned in "DivanüLügati'tTürk" as "balubalu".⁴ As a matter of fact when the era KaşgarlıMahmut lived in will be taken into consideration it can be claimed that the tradition of lullaby was still present in the year 1074.

Lullaby isn't a style only belonging to the Turkish Nation. Lullabies are present in different countries under different names.⁵ But it is a reality though undesired that this unique source which has been in the residence of a culture of 1000 years and which possesses uncountable benefits for children, is unfortunately not in a position it in fact deserves. Besides it is another fact that it hasn't been researched sufficiently and related to this the source of lullabies is disposed to be forgotten.⁶ According to NecatiDemir "Considering the Turkish Culture and Turkish Literature it's a great misfortune that lullabies as a complete whole haven't been compiled and written down."⁷

1.1. The Features of Lullabies and Their Effect on Children

Lullaby is a tradition sung all over the World in order to send children to sleep. The due tradition has very positive and constructive effects on children. Because of this reason sources that apply to the interest of children should be given special importance.⁸ Besides the positive effect of the lullabies on children the clues they bear in their body provide significant contribution for the scientists of today. If we should shortly mention them:

1. Lullabies are sung for boys as well as girls.
2. When babies are afraid of sudden movements and sudden voices their blood pressure and heartbeats rise immediately. Lullaby draws this high blood pressure suffered by children into a normal level and this is achieved in a very short time.
3. Lullabies provide for a healthier period of growing up.
4. The language of lullabies is simple, plain and fluent. As a result children comprehend the words being sung very rapidly and are able to learn them in a very short time.
5. A child that grows up by listening to the lullabies of its mother will have a much healthier kind of communication with her.
6. While the baby communicates with the mother through lullabies its mind becomes active. Because as long as the mother keeps speaking or singing the related perception centres in the brain of the child remain stimulated. And this contributes to a faster comprehension of the desired information the baby is supposed to perceive.
7. Some expressions taking place in lullabies transfer children lots of subjects about life.
8. Lullabies take the tension present on the child and thus ease the baby's falling asleep.
9. The lullabies sung assist children in forming a calmer kind of personality.
10. The words of the lullabies comprise wishes, desires and love; generally meant for the wellbeing of the child. Consequently the due desires affect the child's subconsciousness positively.

² Amil Çelebioğlu, Türk Ninniler Hazinesi, Kitabevi Yayınları, İstanbul 1995, p. 9-13.

³ Amil Çelebioğlu, Türk Ninniler Hazinesi, Ülker Yayınları, İstanbul 1982, p.16.

⁴ Kaşgarlı Mahmud, Tercüme: Besim Atalay, DivânüLügâti't Türk, Ankara, 1941, c.3

⁵ Çelebioğlu 1995, ibidp. 9-13. – Doğan ibidp. 349, 350, 351.- Hatice Poyraz, Okulöncesi Eğitiminin İlke ve Yöntemleri, Anı Yayınları, Ankara, 2003. p. 17.

⁶ Necati Demir, Avrupa'da Yasayan 0-6 Yas Grubu Türk Çocuklarına Türkçe ve Türk Kültürünün Öğretilmesinde Kullanılabilecek Bir Materyal: "Türk Ninnileri Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, TheJournal of International SocialResearch Volume 1/5 Fall 2008, p. 227.

⁷ Demir, ibid2008, p. 227.

⁸ Miyasoğlu Mustafa, Çocuk Edebiyatı Yıllığı, Gökyüzü Yayınları, İstanbul 1987, p.385.

11. Lullabies sung permanently give children the feeling that their mother is always with them. And this fact provides for the baby's feeling itself safe when it is fast asleep.
12. Lullabies provide for a healthy communication between the mother and her baby. And this situation makes the mother and her baby get closer.
13. The mother is able to direct her child through the lullabies she sings by improvisation. That is the more it is referred to plants, objects, colours and items taking⁹ place in the lullabies the more activated get the perception centres in the brain of the children. And this means as a result that the mind of the children get developed much more by thinking about all those items.¹⁰
14. Lullabies have the aspect of a historical document in that they comprise history, social life, traditions and customs within their body.
15. The lullabies sung by the mother strenghtens the bond that is still present between the mother and the baby so much more. Because the mother keeps the communication fresh and permanent through her lullabies and thus doesn't let the bond between become weaker. In this way the baby grows up as a whole, united in one body without getting foreign to its own mother.

1.2. The Relationship between Mother and Baby and the Contribution of the Lullabies to this Relationship

Generally lullabies are in the form of ballads and are sung in quatrains. Nonetheless, besides the form of quatrains there are various kinds of other forms. As they are generally sung with the intention to send children to sleep there are also harmony in the rhyming and repetition of the sound at the end of every line. The expressions taking place in the lullabies can be toned by the mother in various types just according to the mood of the babies. For instance when the babies insist on not sleeping the tone of the mother's voice may rise and when the babies start taking a sleeping position the tone of her voice may get lower. In each situation the baby gets the message and acts in accordance with the way it is directed to.

The mother sings the texts of the lullabies via improvisation and the inspirations she got from her experiences of life. In the due texts the mother refers from time to time to her husband, mother in law, natural disasters, wars, her happiness, her sorrows etc. with all these tellings the mother is in a way transferring all the happenings of the day to the baby, informing the baby and thus communicating with it. The real reason of why the children are affected by the expressions taking place in the lullabies has its source in the mother's sharing the events that make her sad or happy in a sincere and heartly way. And so the baby is able to follow the happenings day by day out of what it hears and able to feel its mother's mood deeply. As a matter of fact the baby takes its place within the social life even in the period it is in its mother's womb. Babies are able to feel the love and tension in the environment outside when they are in their mother's womb.¹¹ As a matter of fact there is a biological and psychological bond between the child and the mother that starts even in the period in the mother's womb.¹²

This powerful bond is realized with the help of the hormones that are secreted in the pre-birth period and the period very close to birth. The due hormones are acting as contributors to reinforce the feeling of motherhood and strengthening the bond that is still present between the mother and the baby much more.¹³ This bond that is realized between the mother and the baby becomes so strong and developes so much that the mother can differentiate her baby's voice amongst tens of crying babies and feels her baby's getting hungry out of the sharp pain she suffers all over her breasts. And the baby in the same way distinguishes its own mother's voice and her scent out of tens of women and when it cries it only gets soothed by hearing its own mother's voice.¹⁴ As a matter of fact the mother's voice is not foreign to the child. Babies discriminate their mother's voice even in the period they are in their mother's womb the reason of which lies in the permanent communication during the pre-natal period. That means babies are able to hear their mother's voice before birth.

⁹Demir, *ibid*2008, s.228-229., Firdevs Güneş, Ninnilerin Çocukların Dil ve Zihinsel Gelişimine Etkisi, Effects of Lullabies on Linguistic and Mental Development of Children, ZfWTVol. 2, No. 3 (2010) p.28.

¹⁰ Hasan Güneş, Bilişsel Gelişim Sürecinde Etkili Öğrenme Teknikleri, YYU, Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, Sayı 16, 2009, p.142-164.

¹¹DodsonFitzhugh, *Çocuğunuzu Tanıyor Musunuz? Denge Yayınları*, 2. Baskı, İstanbul 1997, p. 41-42. Sefa Saygılı, *Bedenen ve Ruhun Sağlıklı Çocuk Yetiştirmek*, Hayat Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p.11.

¹² Saygılı, *ibid*Ali Çankırılı, *Babacığım Neredesin? Çocuk Eğitiminde Babanın Rolü*, Elit Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, p.23.

¹³Hasan Güneş, *Çocuğun Dünyası*, Hayat Yayınları, İstanbul 2011.

¹⁴ Güneş, 2011, *ibid*

According to scientific researches made recently it is expressed that babies hear the environment outside even when they are in their mother's womb and react accordingly. According to an announcement "The ears of babies start to be formed onwards the 8 th week even though they don't function at all. Babies start to hear what happens in the environment outside onwards the 18 th week but react to what they hear onwards the 32 nd week".¹⁵ And according to another claim it is announced that babies start hearing onwards the 25 th week.¹⁶ Even though there are various claims concerning the periods when babies start hearing and start giving reactions there is an acknowledged common view and this is the fact that babies start hearing when they are in their mother's womb. Consequently the mother's communicating with the baby in her womb, telling it nice words, speaking to it and singing lullabies for it in this pre-natal period are very important things in regard of the emotional development of the child.¹⁷ In case of bad words or debates within the family the baby will be affected negatively so parents should be extra careful in this period and should try hard not to exchange bad words or carry out any kind of debates.¹⁸ Being aware of this fact educators start the education of the child even in the mother's womb. At the end of the education period in the pre-natal period it has been reached to the conclusion that there is a difference of six months, considering the functions of the intelligence, between babies that are educated and the ones who are not.¹⁹

The fact that babies are able to hear the world outside the womb was declared following the experiments carried out in the 19 th century. Whereas the tradition of singing lullabies, which has its origins in our own culture, has been carrying out the same function for centuries. Consequently this reality is the evidence of how significant the tradition and culture of speaking with children through lullabies, being continued for centuries, is in fact.

2- Lullabies Activate the Actions of the Brain

The brain has a very complex structure and there are still some uncertainties in the way of working of the brain functions. The brain enters a very rapid development period after birth and completes its development until the age of six to a great extent. The brain possesses about 100 billion neurons (nerve cells) and amongst the neurons information flows like electric current.²⁰ The neurons consume % 25 of the oxygen and most amount of the glucose taken into the human body.²¹ And this shows how hard the brain works. A neuron in a human being's brain has the capability to establish from 2000 up to 10.000 connections with other neurons.²² This capability makes humankind superior to other beings.²³ Regarding its functions the brain consists of four parts that are right, left, upper and lower.²⁴ The right and left hemispheres are responsible of different functions.²⁵

The connection between these two hemispheres is provided by the bunch of net corpus callosum and this net makes a continuous exchange of information possible between the two hemispheres.²⁶ People use one of the brain hemispheres more dominantly according to the other one, the reason of which can be searched at congenital causes, the way they are grown up and educated or various other reasons. Consequently if a person uses one hemisphere much more than the other one he makes that hemisphere work more dominantly and makes the learning activity based on that hemisphere.²⁷ The appropriate stimulations that come from outside can activate the brain much more.²⁸ Because of the due reasons the parents should pay special attention to the post-natal period of their children during the babyhood. As a matter of fact it is possible to enlarge the capacity of the brain. Because individuals, who are adults and have a good job, are only able to use % 2-3 of their brain capacities. When we approach this fact vice - versa it can be seen that % 97 of the brain capacity isn't being used.

¹⁵<http://www.xbebek.com/bebekler-ne-zaman-duymaya-baslar.html> Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011. 13.00

¹⁶http://www.kadinlararasi.com/3_aile/anne-karninda-duyu-organlarinin-gelisimi. Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011. 13.00.

¹⁷<http://www.xbebek.com/bebekler-ne-zaman-duymaya-baslar.html> Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011. 13.00

¹⁸<http://www.xbebek.com/bebekler-ne-zaman-duymaya-baslar.html> Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011. 13.00

¹⁹http://www.turkdiliveedebiyati.com/cocuk_edebiyati_genel_ozellikleri-t3384.0.html;wap2=. Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011, 08.00.

²⁰ Korkut Yalıtıkaya: Belleğin Fizyolojisi, Bilim Teknik, Ankara 2000, p.42-44

²¹ M.B. Sprenger: Becoming a "Wiz" at Brain-Based Teaching. Thousand Oaks, 2002, p.15.

²² See Nevzat Tarhan, Soyut Düşünme ve Beynin Sırları, Okur-Yazar Dergisi, Mart 2004.

²³ Güneş, 2009 ibid den alınmıştır.

²⁴ M. Seba Kestet, İnsan Vücudu (7. Baskı) TÜBİTAK Popüler Bilim Kitapları, Nural Matbaacılık, Ankara, 2000, p. 33.

²⁵ See Donald O. Hebb, The Role of Neurological Ideas in Psychology, Journal of Personality, Sep51, Vol. 20 Issue 1, p.17-39.

²⁶ Gloria Frender, Learning To Learn: Strengthening Study Skills and Brain Power, G. 1990, p. 20.

²⁷ Zeynep Müge Kasaroglu, Bülent Şentürk, Uygulamalar ve Pratiklerle Süper Hafıza Teknikleri, Akis Kitap, İstanbul, 2008, p.15. To get a detailed further information about this subject see Güneş, ibid 2009, p.142-164.

²⁸ This section given in the quotation marks is taken from the Güneş 2009 ibid, without being changed.

And this shows that our brain isn't being used sufficiently. According to the expressions of the experts the above mentioned situation can be altered. In order to enlarge the brain capacities of their children parents can read or tell them fairy tales and stories and sing them lullabies in their babyhood. And when their children are grown up they can seek further methods to enlarge their brain capacities in applying the exercises supposed to develop the brain functions.²⁹ In this way parents will have assisted their children in making them use the present capacity of brain with the most active way to its full. If realized this will be an achievement that will work for both the benefits of the future of their own family and their country.

3-The Educational Aspect of Lullabies

Lullabies that are one of the main sources of our culture for more than thousand years have a significant and effective place in our culture. Lullaby is only one of the main products of our folk literature that are originated from different eras, are transferred from generation to generation and affect children in a positive way. For this reason lullabies have an unplaceable importance in our culture.

According to the researches made recently it has been announced that lullabies that are mainly supposed to make children sleep have also an educational aspect and are not far away from scientific truths.

According to a research made in 1990 in the University of Konstanz in Germany it has been declared that babies owing to the lessons they received during the pre-natal period comprehend the geometrical figures much easier than those who didn't get an education in their mother's womb at all.³⁰

The potential mothers being uninformed about the scientific researches made in the near history, have already been speaking to the babies in their wombs or the newborn ones for centuries either being affected by the cultural structure or the instincts of a motherhood. After a natural process in lullabies mothers unknowingly told the babies they carried in their wombs information about lots of subjects varying from agriculture to space, from plants to animals, from colours to objects etc. in this situation the first perception of the child is through the ear and this makes the contribution of "mother songs" more meaningful.³¹ Evaluating the due information a necessity emerged to review the texts of the lullabies closer and when the texts have been examined it has been seen that educational components reside under the roof of lullabies.³² Within the due texts there is information about children's growing up by sleeping (may my child sleep and grow) or the movements of the stars in the sky (a star is moving in the sky) and further information the alike. However it is quite an interesting thing that information which can be only comprehended or solved by the help of science today was taking place within the lullabies that have been sung for centuries. According to NecatiDemir lullabies have a content that work far beyond the supposed mission which is to send children to sleep.³³ For this reason the fact that lullabies that were commonly supposed for children's sleep possess in fact so much information in general terms shouldn't escape our notice. Lullabies on one hand contribute to the mental and biological development of children in a positive way and on the other hand enlighten our present day with the scientific truths they contain.

Going out of the information about lullabies a question may occur in our minds, that wants to know if lullabies which are products of folk literature sung for more than 1000 years and having so many aspects, have really a scientific background and scientific truth?

In fact there isn't a clear answer to this question. However it shouldn't be forgotten that lullabies, even though they might not be scientific, enlighten the truths and give them a direction.

Conclusion

Lullabies are known as harmonious words sung mainly with the purpose of sending children to sleep. Though within the passing time it has come into being that it educates the ones that keep listening to it. In order to achieve a permanent and positive change in the behaviours through education, the education of children should start at early ages.

²⁹Güneş, ibid 2009, p.142-164.

³⁰http://www.turkdiliveedebyati.com/cocuk_edebyati_genel_ozellikleri-t3384.0.html;wap2=. Erişim Tarihi: 08.04.2011, 08.00.

³¹NecateBaykoçDönmez, Ülkü Abidoğlu, Çağlayan Dinçer, Nilay Erdemir ve Şebnem. Gümüşçü, Dil Gelişimi Etkinlikleri, Ya-Pa Yayınları, (3.Baskı),İstanbul 2000, p. 22.

³²Demir, 2008 ibidp. 228.

³³ Demir, 2008 ibidp. 225.

Because of this reason the education of children is tried to be pulled down by using different methods to earlier ages. The method to educate by singing lullabies is one of the methods mentioned. However mothers can't spare enough time for their children owing to the problems and tiring conditions in their business lives. For this reason some regulations should be made in the business life that keep mothers from realizing their duties as mothers. Because it is impossible to recompensate the education of children who have been neglected. That's why necessary precautions should be taken in a very short time and mothers should be enabled to realize their primary job that is "motherhood". Concerning this issue there is much work to do especially for husbands, employers and the governments that are supposed to give women the legal rights to make that possible.

Besides the due precautions the fact that lullabies educate children shouldn't be ignored. As a matter of fact it shouldn't be forgotten that babies born by listening to lullabies and the ones raised with them are more intelligent than the other children and comprehend events more easily. For this reason

- more importance should be given to lullabies and more efforts for their compilation,
- the benefits of the lullabies should be broadened by explaining them via different means of mass media,
- mothers should be instructed about the benefits of lullabies and encouraged to sing them permanently.

Lullabies are cultural treasures so precious that we can't afford ignoring them. Consequently it shouldn't be forgotten that telling lullabies is a new method in the education of children and is used very effectively.

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