

# Children's Literature: A Tool to Enrich Learning in the Elementary School

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**Abstract** - Children's Literature (CL) has been identified as an effective tool to develop essential competencies such as creativity and critical thinking in the young learners. Although Literature has been given a prominent place in Sri Lanka, CL has been limited to reading for pleasure. This case study investigated the impact of CL in the development of creativity, critical thinking and positive attitudes in the Elementary School (ES) children in Sri Lanka. Twenty ES teachers in the state schools in Sri Lanka were interviewed to identify their views on using CL as a learning tool in the classroom. Observations and interviews were conducted on three Fourth-Grade classes to examine the exposure of the students to CL and their perception of the themes in CL. Conclusions were made by evaluating the responses of the students to the CL material used in the classroom. Key findings of the study were; although the ES students had access to story books majority of them were not interested in reading or listening to stories because they were not motivated by their parents or teachers; ES teachers were unaware of the techniques of using CL for skill development; many popular CL have unconsciously inculcated negative attitudes in the students; themes in many CL were more suitable for adults than the children; responses of the ES students to CL displayed their creativity and critical thinking ability as well as their values and attitudes; Children have an innate ability for creativity and critical thinking which can be developed with the correct guidance of the teachers and adults. Finally the data emerged from the study revealed the effectiveness of CL as a learning tool to develop skills of ES students.

**Keywords:** Children's Literature, Elementary School, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Attitudes

## I. INTRODUCTION

Story telling had been a mode of cultural transmission from one generation to another even before the printed media was introduced to the society. This has been widely practiced in the Western, Eastern, African, Indian and Arabian cultures. These orally transmitted stories were later transferred to the printed form. Bible stories, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Jathaka stories, Greek Mythology, Aesop's Fables, and Arabian Nights are some popular writings in the past. Literature had existed in Egypt and Samaria from the early Bronze Age that is 2600 BC.

A glorious literary tradition which is unique to Sri Lanka too can be traced to the pre-colonial Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). An adult, usually the Father or the Mother read a story from a children's book to the child before putting the child to sleep which became known as 'bedtime stories'.

Many researchers have uncovered the effectiveness of using Literature in the development of skills such as language, creativity and critical thinking of students from the elementary level to the higher education (Audsley, 2019; Magulod, 2018; Heath and Young, 2017; Liu and Young, 2017; Bradbery, 2012; Crippen, 2012; Norton, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2004; Lancia, 1997).

Some key benefits that have been identified were; Literature takes the learner from his or her narrow perception of the world to a wider and deeper perception; develops the critical thinking ability of a person; develops the awareness of one's own culture as well as the other cultures which gives the ability to a person to appreciate, tolerate and honour his or her own culture as well as the other cultures; helps students to develop emotional intelligence and creativity, nurtures growth and development of their personality and social skills. Further it transmits themes from one generation to the other. Baumann and Bergeron (1993), has identified instruction in story mapping as an effective instructional strategy for promoting students' ability to identify central narrative elements in authentic children's literature.

In this context, Literature has been introduced to the secondary school curriculum in Sri Lanka for many decades but clear statements on the aims of teaching Literature in the schools in Sri Lanka could not be identified in any official document. There is a dearth of research on the teaching and learning of Literature in the schools in Sri Lanka. Moreover, use of Literature in the primary school was limited to relating a story to the student by the teacher or recitation of a poem or song in the classroom.

Report of the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of 2015 has identified the period of birth to the age of eight of a child as the most crucial period for development and learning. Interactive story books have been suggested as an effective strategy to develop the higher level thinking skills and creativity of a child. Literature teaches young children about the world they live in and as a result, Literature plays a large role in the children's perception of others. Teachers are responsible for shaping the minds of the children and Literature has a large impact on how children learn about others. (White, 2015) With the advancement of technology children seemed to have been drawn away from books to the television and the computer which had greatly hindered their creativity and imagination.

Many Research studies have highlighted that creativity enables the problem solving ability of people. Crippen (2012) has found out that children's literature helped in the development of emotional intelligence and creativity of a child. Exposing children to quality literature can contribute to the creation of responsible, successful and caring individuals.

Thus, the objectives of this research were to; examine the exposure of the primary school students in Sri Lanka to Children's Literature; identify the challenges of using the children's literature as a tool of Education; examine the students' perspective of children's literature; and examine how children's literature can be used to develop the attitudes, critical thinking and creativity of the primary students.

The research was conducted as a case study and the participants of the study were teachers and students of primary schools in Sri Lanka. Initially data were collected from interviews with a purposive sample of twenty primary school teachers from the Western Province of Sri Lanka to identify the views of the teachers on using children's literature as a learning tool in the classroom. Student participants of the research were sixty-five Fourth Grade students from three state schools in Sri Lanka. The student sample consisted of forty girls and twenty-five boys. Data were gathered from classroom observations and interviews as well as informal discussions with the students.

Qualitative data gathered from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed using inductive methods under the themes that emerged from data to identify the challenges faced by the teachers when using CL in the classroom and to examine the students' perspective of CL.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Exposure of ES students to CL

Each classroom in the sample consisted of students from various socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Students from low socio-economic background owned only a very few children's books donated or gifted to them by someone. They had no interest in reading any books. It may be because they had no motivation or support from their family for reading books.

Children from the middle and upper socio-economic backgrounds possessed many story books in both Mother Tongue and in English. Their collection consisted of more educational books than story books. Many of them had variety of expensive and colourful books on various subjects such as Alphabet, Words, Numbers, Birds, and Shapes etc. Majority of the Story books they owned were aimed to develop the knowledge of the children rather than giving them pleasure and enjoyment. These books enabled the children to expand their repertoire of vocabulary. Motivation they received from their parents and adults was

academic and knowledge-based rather than to foster creativity and critical thinking or to inculcate attitudes. However, the schools had well-equipped Libraries with children's books on a range of themes. In-addition, each class had a 'Reading Corner' with many books and all the students in the class had access to these books. The books available could be categorized under the following themes.

1. Educational and fictional picture books; Folklores, fables, myths, legends and fairy tales which convey the tradition, culture, values, beliefs and customs of former generations;
  2. Educational books on subjects such as Environment, History, Geography and Science; and Poetry and verse.
- Some of them had grand-mothers or an elderly relation who related stories to them from time to time which were mostly about well-known figures in Sri Lanka such as And are who was a famous court jester during the reign of King Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe or historical stories of ancient kings such as Dutugamunu.

Children from the low socio-economic background had little exposure to stories because the adults in their homes did not have time or interest to read stories to them. Parents of the middle or upper socio-economic group had a busy work schedule and the little spare time they had they spent on the educational development of the child.

Although the teachers used CL in the class for teaching, it was limited only to reading the story aloud to the children and if the story was in English it was explained in the Mother Tongue. They believed it was too early to develop the creativity and critical thinking of the students. Sometimes they asked a few questions from the students only to test their listening comprehension. According to Blend (2013), the best literary apprenticeship for a child is the creative participation in Children's Literature. When the children are empowered to construct the world created in the text, they will gain great pleasure through this.

However, many poems and stories students were frequently exposed to in and outside the classrooms were thematically more suitable for adult learners than children. This may be because many ancient children's literature were originally meant for the adults but later adapted for children. For example, Rev. Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* which was originally written as a social criticism on child labour and '*Gulliver's Travels*' by Jonathan Swift which was meant to be a political satire have now become popular stories among children.

The famous children's poem '*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall*' has many historical speculations and none of these speculations have anything to do with children. According to one speculation, it was a riddle about the King Richard III who rode to a battle on a horse named Wall. He had fallen off the horse and died in the battle. In another speculation Humpty Dumpty was a powerful cannon used during the English Civil War. This canon was fatally damaged during the siege of Colchester. Other than the

rhyming pattern, there is nothing in this poem that is of any interest to the young learners.

Values, attitudes and beliefs depicted in CL that contribute towards the development of emotional intelligence of a child can vary from country to country and sometimes within the country among diverse ethnic, religious and cultural groups. However, development of creative thinking is common to all the children in the world. According to Bryant (2017) people must compete against their own inventions by exploiting the most human of their human qualities such as empathy, a willingness to work together, adaptability and innovation. Creativity and critical thinking are two uniquely human and essential attributes that avert our own obsolescence.

### III. CHALLENGES OF USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS A LEARNING TOOL IN THE CLASSROOM

Although there was a reading corner in each ES classroom, majority of the Fourth Grade students were not interested in reading any of the books which were freely available for them. One main reason for this was the pressure they had to go through to fulfil the ambitions of their teachers and parents to get through the 'Scholarship Examination' in the Fifth Grade. After attending to their formal school work, students neither had the time nor the interest to read books. Interview data revealed that ninety percent of the children were not interested in listening to stories or reading story books. They preferred to watch cartoons, movies and animated fairy tales on television or computer rather than reading story books or listening to stories.

Majority of the parents believed reading storybooks to be a waste of time. They believed that the child should not be exposed to fantasy but reality. Moreover, parents of many children were employed and they came home in the late evening. The little time they had they spent on attending to household chores and in the supervision of children's school work. One Mother said, *"How can we relate stories to them? It is late when the home work is done and sometimes my son goes to sleep on the table even without dinner."* Many parents agreed that their children were more interested in watching movies or cartoons than reading books. *"It is more convenient and successful. There are movies based on popular children's stories. We save the time and effort of reading the story. Children too understand the story better when it is enacted and they enjoy it more"* Teachers expressed their disappointment at the students not using the book corner in the classroom. *"I equipped the book cupboard with much care and effort. Actually most of the books in the cupboard are brought by me. I try to get them to have a look at the books when there is spare time but none of them is interested. When they are given the books they hit one another with the books"* When the teachers were asked whether they used the story books in their teaching, they said that they did not directly use books for teaching but read or narrated the stories to them.

However, these stories were meant only for pleasure and enjoyment because they believed that the children were too young to respond critically or creatively. One teacher said *"It is with greatest difficulty I get their attention to listen to the story. They simply are not interested in listening to stories. Not only that, we do not have enough time to use the stories extensively in the classroom for learning. We need to pay attention to the syllabus. Many students cannot still read or write. If we spend time telling stories in the class, parents would complain"*

There are research studies that have uncovered the ability of the children for creativity and critical thinking. According to Carter (2008), creativity is more a skill than inborn talent which can be developed in children. This skill is essential in the development of emotional intelligence as well as for the advancement of artistic expressions, science, mathematics and social sciences. However, this has not been practiced in the ES in Sri Lanka.

Some teachers were of the view that out of the box thinking may lead to the unsuccessfulness of the child at the examinations because they would not be able to produce expected answers at the examinations. Thus, they are reluctant to promote critical thinking in the classroom. ES teachers were of the opinion that it was too early to develop the creativity of students. According to them, creativity was a high order skill which could be developed in an individual only after the mastery of other skills.

It was evident that the ES teachers were not aware of the strategies and techniques of using stories to develop the higher order skills of creativity, problem solving or critical thinking of students. Development of Creativity as well as Critical Thinking is a long process which can be developed very successfully, if the process begins at an early age.

### IV. IMPACT OF CL ON THE FORMATION OF ATTITUDES IN THE YOUNG LEARNERS

Poems and rhymes are commonly used by both parents and teachers for enjoyment and learning. Alphabet, words, and basic mathematical concepts such as addition and deduction are practiced using children's songs. When the responses of the ES students were observed it was evident that many stories, songs and poems were used in the class without any meaningful guidance.

Children grasp their attitudes and values by listening to and observing the adults. Teachers are a primary source of influence upon developing the mindset of a child. Songs and poems were frequently used by the ES teachers as entertainment for the students but they rarely paid attention to the message conveyed to the students through these stories, poems and songs.

### A. Cruel Joy

A group of ES students were being practiced for a concert. One item was based on a popular Sinhala song for children '*AmbalmePina, Pina*.' The song speaks about a pot seller who walked on the streets happily to sell his pots when he was unexpectedly attacked by a bull that broke all his pots. This misfortune of the pot seller gives much enjoyment to the onlooker who could not stop laughing and the students were repeated being practiced to enact this scene.

After one such practice a student was accompanied home by her mother when they met an old man carrying a load of coconuts on his bicycle. The man had lost his balance and had fallen on the road with the bicycle and the coconuts in his sack had scattered on the road. Instead of helping the man to pick up the coconuts the little girl had started laughing aloud to the embarrassment of her mother. When she reprimanded the shameful behavior of the child, she had innocently recited the song '*AmbalmePinaPina*'. The child was not taught to help those who were in trouble but she was taught to laugh at their misfortune.

There are some poems that create gruesome pictures in the minds of children which may lead them to be insensitive towards cruelty. One such poem is the '*Ding-Dong Bell ...*'. This poem speaks about a boy who has put a cat into a well.

Another such poem is about the '*Three blind mice*' that ran after a farmer's wife who would cut their tails off with a carving knife. Although adults may not pay attention to the meanings conveyed in the poems and songs the children are exposed to, it may have a great impact on the children who try to understand the world around them through their experiences.

### B. Response of ES students to Children's Stories

Stories are very effective in the inculcation of values and attitudes of young children. They are inspired by the characters in the stories that are related to them and they try to understand the world around them through the incidents shared in the stories. Many children learn and form their behavior and attitudes by observing and imitating these characters. Thus, if the children are not directed appropriately, they may form attitudes and opinions which may be difficult to change in later life. Two such examples are given below. In the first incident, narrative style of the teacher led to the formulation of negative attitudes and in the second incident it was the content in the story that led to promote negative behavior in the students.

### C. Harmful Attitude

The story of '*Dutugamunu*', a King who reigned in the South of Sri Lanka was narrated to a group of Fourth Grade students with the intention of glorifying the history of Sri Lanka. In her narration, the teacher identified with the King

'*Dutugamunu*' who worked for the development of the Sinhala community and Buddhism in Sri Lanka and glorified the battle he fought with '*Elara*', a Tamil King who ruled in the North of Sri Lanka. At end of the lesson, when the students were asked whether they liked the King *Dutugamunu* they unanimously responded; "*Yes*". When they were asked why they liked him, one student said; "*He killed a bad man*" and when they were asked whether killing was '*good*' their unanimous response was '*Yes*'. When they were asked why they thought the killing was good, some of them answered; "*He is Tamil*"

According to the original story, '*Elara*' was not killed because he was Tamil, but he was killed because he tried to invade the South which was not his territory. Sri Lanka being a multiethnic nation, it is the responsibility of the teacher to help the students to grasp the accurate meaning conveyed in the story that would promote only positive attitudes and not harmful attitudes.

### D. Trespassing is not wrong

Young children find it difficult to understand the boundaries in the adult world whether those boundaries are physical, social or cultural. They learn proper and improper behaviour from the adults, mainly their parents and teachers.

During a teaching session, an ES teacher attempted to inculcate good values in the students by speaking to them on the importance of honouring the privacy of other people. She emphasized on the vile of trespassing into other peoples' gardens. Students appeared to be confused with what she was trying to convey.

At the end of her preaching, some students questioned why it was wrong to '*enter into a garden*' and the teacher tried to explain that it was because the property did not belong to them. Then one student commented; '*I think it is good to go to the giant's garden*' and the other students agreed with this.

The same teacher had read a story to the students a few weeks ago, from a children's story book which was about a beautiful garden that belonged to a Giant. The garden had been full of trees laden with fruits and flowers and the children had entered the garden to enjoy the fruits and play in the garden. The Giant was furious with the children for trespassing and chased them away. The garden became unproductive without children, which led the giant to repent of his action and to welcome children back into the garden. When the children started coming back to the garden, it once again became productive.

The message in this story would be more suitable for the adults who are unkind to the children but not for the children who learn by studying the adults. Since their exposure to experiences is limited, they try to learn by imitating the characters they encounter in the stories they listen to, read or watch in the television. They get confused

about the acceptable behavior when they are exposed to stories that contradict with the behavior expected of them. Stories have a great influence on students. Incidents in the stories are realistic to the students and they tend to identify with the characters and the situations.

### ***E. Stepmother harassed the Baby***

A famous folk story was related to a group of Forth Grade students. It was the story about a grieving mother quail that killed her little son over some dried flowers. The flowers which were laid on a rock by the mother quail had dried in the heat of the sun and when the flowers were not visible, she suspected that her son had eaten those. She dashed the little bird on the rock in anger and killed him but just then the rain poured and the flowers reappeared on the rock. Realizing her mistake, the mother bird could never stop grieving for her son.

The students in the class were dismayed by this story. Their perception of the 'Mother' was a compassionate, loving person who would never harm her child for any reason. The 'Mother' they were familiar with would sacrifice her food to the child, not kill the child for the sake of flowers. The message in this story would be more suitable for adults who had no control over their temper but not for the young children.

The students refused to accept that the Mother quail killed the little son. One child said; "*I think it was not the mother. It was another bad, big bird. He killed the baby bird*" while another child said; "*It is not the mother. I think it is the stepmother. Stepmother killed the baby*". This is another perception students have acquired from the Children's Literature. Many stories children were exposed to had portrayed the 'Step Mother' as evil. The stories they were familiar with such as; Hanzel and Gratel, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella had wicked step mothers who intended to harm young children. Adults have not given attention to the harmful attitudes inculcated in the minds of the children through the stories they have been constantly exposed to.

### ***F. Black is Bad***

A story about two children was related to the students in the sample. The story was related using a colourful picture that depicted the two children in the story; One child was fair complexioned and the other was dark complexioned. Both girls had similar features except for the skin complexion. The fair girl was holding a book under her armpit and the dark girl was cuddling a cat closer to her bosom. According to the story, one girl was mischievous and selfish while the other girl was caring and compassionate but they were not told which girl in the picture was selfish and which girl was compassionate.

At the end of the story, the students were asked to identify *the mischievous child and the good child*' in the picture. All

the children unanimously identified the child with the dark complexion to be the '*bad*' child but they could not logically explain why they considered her to be the '*bad*' child. Some of their responses were; "*She is black and ugly*"; *she is hurting the cat*"; "*She is bad*"

None of the above reasons were conveyed in the picture but their pre-conceived attitudes led them to decide that the dark girl should be the '*bad*' girl. It was evident that they were prejudiced against her only because of her dark complexion. When the students were asked to draw a picture of a '*good person*', most of them coloured the hair of the figure they drew in brown or yellow and the face and the hands in pink, yellow or orange.

Illustrations of many children's story books available for these students portrayed the complexion of devils, villains and evil people in black or dark brown whereas the complexion of angels and good natured people in light shades of white, yellow and pink. Thus the students had unconsciously internalized the '*dark*' complexion to be bad and evil. Illustrations and colours in the books have a strong influence on children who depend mostly on the picture to understand the story. Ironically, majority of the Sri Lankans are '*dark*' in complexion.

Not only the story books, but the teachers and the adults too were responsible for the inculcation of these prejudices in children. Teachers selected fair complexioned students for the plays and dances in the school concert or to the school band. Parents used '*suduputha, sududuwa*' (*fair son, fair daughter*) as a term of endearment. It can be said that the prejudices inculcated in the adults in their childhood or infancy is being transferred to the next generation unconsciously.

Many children's stories that the children are fond of in Sri Lanka have highlighted the physical appearance as the key to a happy and successful life. *Beauty and the Beast* and the *Frog Prince* are two such examples of how two valiant and noble men were rejected because of their looks. Both had to be loved by two beautiful girls for them to turn to handsome men. These are the attitudes of the adults but not the children. After relating the story of the *Beauty and the Beast* the students were asked to name the character they liked most in the story and majority of the students liked the *Beast* before he turned to be a handsome prince. They did not understand why it was necessary for him to become handsome.

Many popular olden day children's stories now available as movies as well, have associated good values and behavior with the outward appearance. Girls of noble virtues were extremely beautiful. Cinderella who was gentle, humble and hardworking was very beautiful while her wicked step sisters were ugly.

Snow White who was gentle, loving and caring was the most beautiful girl in the world. These are only a few

examples of many children's stories that glorified physical appearance by associating outward beauty with good virtues and outward unattractiveness with evil.

## V. CONTRIBUTION OF CL TO DEVELOP OF CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING OF ES STUDENTS

The child learns by critically examining the world around them and this prepares them to face the challenges in the society. Many children are capable of re-constructing their own version of a story by giving a new interpretation to the illustrations in the children's story books. A study conducted by Shine and Roser (1999), has revealed that the children tried to interpret the emotions of the characters and tried to find solutions to problems or imagined the consequences of various events. A few famous children's stories were used as test material with the Fourth-Grade students in the sample to examine their interpretation of the themes and messages conveyed in the stories and their responses were very logical and creative. One such example is given below.

### A. Who is to be blamed?

'Little Red Riding Hood' was a very popular story among the children in Sri Lanka. This story had been read to the children several times by their teachers and adults and it had been made into plays in the ES concerts. Almost all the students knew the story well. However, it had never been used as a learning tool to develop the creativity or critical thinking of the students. The story was related to the students using multi-media and colourful illustrations.

*In the original story a little girl named Red Riding Hood goes to visit her sick grandmother who lives in a home in the wood that has dangerous animals. Her mother warns her not to speak to strangers in the wood but Red Riding Hood speaks with the wolf and tells him everything about her visit to the grandmother. Wolf reaches the grandmother before Red Riding Hood and gulps her. Then dressed in the clothes of the grandmother and pretending to be her, he tries to eat Red Riding Hood too. However, when a wood cutter hears the screams of the girl he comes and saves the girl from the wolf.*

After the presentation of the story, the students were asked to explain the message conveyed in the story. Some of their responses are given below.

1. It is not good to walk alone in the forest
2. Grandmother should not be alone in a very faraway place
3. Mother should not send children alone to dangerous place
4. We must not have bad friends
5. We must help people when they shout for help

Majority of the students named the 'Wood Cutter' as their favourite character in the story because; *He helped Red Riding Hood and the Grand Mother* and *"he was not afraid of the wolf."* Some liked the wood cutter because he did not kill the wolf but only chased him away. Ironically, the character majority of the students did not like was the *"Mother of Red Riding Hood"*. Some reasons they gave for their dislike were;

1. She did not love her daughter. She sent her alone. She did not check whether Red Riding Hood went safely.
2. She knew there is the wolf in the forest. She sent her daughter for the wolf to eat her
3. She did not love the grandmother. She did not go to see her. She should bring the grandmother home. Grand Mother is sick and hungry. She has no food. She did not bring her.
4. She did not give enough food to take. If there is a lot of things, Red Riding Hood can give some to the wolf and wolf will not be hungry. Then he won't eat Grand Mother

When they were asked whether they did not think Red Riding Hood was at fault for disobeying her mother's instructions of not talking to strangers, some of them disagreed. According to them;

1. She was nice and kind to the wolf. She wants to be friendly. It is good to be kind. She feels sorry for the wolf because he is alone in the forest.
2. She is a good girl. She goes to see her Grandma all alone. She is not afraid to go.
3. She loves her grandmother. She goes alone to see her and takes food to her. She is a good girl
4. She walks alone with a big basket. It is full and very heavy. She has to walk a long long way in the forest. She is brave.

When they were asked their opinion about the wolf, some thought the wolf to be bad because;

1. He ate the grandmother and he tried to eat Red Riding Hood
2. He lied to Red Riding Hood. She thought he was a dog (nowhere in the story it is said that she mistook the wolf to be a dog)
3. He is not good. He is a wolf, but he acts like grandmother. He is not a good friend.

Ironically, one student thought the wolf to be good. He said he tried to eat the grandmother and Red Riding Hood because he was hungry. If he was given food, he would not have eaten people. Children appeared to be more sympathetic towards animals and helpless people such as Red Riding Hood and the grandmother, more than the authoritative adult represented by the Mother.

## **B. Poor Dog**

Students were formed into small groups of five and each group was assigned to create a story of their own by looking at the illustrations of the original story. A version of the story related by one group is given below.

*Red Riding Hood is going to the wood. She want to see her grandmother. She is very fear because she is alone. She start to crying and crying. (Picture in the story shows a little girl in a red dress walking happily in the wood but there is no indication of her being afraid or crying) Then a big, kind dog see her. The good dog sorry the girl crying. Girl alone in the wood. He is coming to help her. He is talking Red Riding Hood and tell her 'Don't fear. I will go with you'. Now ... they are good friends. He going with her because she fear to alone in the wood.*

*They go to the grandmother's house but grandmother not there. Grandmother go to supermarket. Grandmother forget Red Riding Hood coming. Red Riding Hood start to crying. Dog telling 'Don't cry. I wait with you. You not alone. We can play'.*

*Dog dressing like grandmother and they play. They are very happy. (Illustration in the book shows the wolf sleeping on the bed wearing the Grandmother's clothes and Red Riding Hood standing next to the bed and speaking with him) Then grandmother come home. She shouting and shouting. (This is not in the illustration but imagined by the students) A man run and chasing the dog with axe. Dog running and not come back. Red Riding Hood sad.*

The students have associated the wolf in the story with a dog. Children in Sri Lanka are not familiar with the wolves. The wolves they know are in the famous cartoons such as 'The White Fang' and the children are very fond of these cartoon characters. On the other hand, the wolf in the illustration resembles an *Alsatian* dog which is familiar to the children. The version of the students reflects their unwillingness to make the wolf the villain of the story.

This is another example of the children sympathizing and justifying the animals over the adult humans. The underlying meaning in the version of the children is that the adults misinterpreted the good intentions of children and the animals. The adult represented by the grandmother chased away the dog that she mistook to be a wolf by not realizing that the dog actually was helping the child. One reason for this interpretation of the students may be due to the resemblance of the wolf to a dog which many children are fond of or it may be a way of resisting the domineering authority of the adults who frequently misjudge the children and make their lives unpleasant by using their authority.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Books children are exposed to are not their own choices but what the adults make available to them. Adults purchase books based on their experiences and interests, but they give

little thought to how the child would respond to the contents in the book. CL contributes not only to develop the creativity and critical thinking but also in the inculcation of values and attitudes in the ES students. Many negative and false values can be unconsciously inculcated in the children through children's stories which would be difficult to change in later life. However with the appropriate guidance from the teachers CL could contribute effectively in changing the attitudes of students than trying to lecture the child on good virtues. Interaction with the characters in a story book helps in the social development of a child. With guided reading by an adult the child may identify with the qualities of good behaviour and reject the negative traits. However the adult involvement is essential for the child to differentiate between the acceptable and unacceptable character traits. Children relate their own feelings, experiences and attitudes when they interpret situations around them.

They bring out ideas creatively by critically evaluating situations. Children are capable of critically evaluating the content of the stories and producing creative new versions to the story, sometimes in a more effective way than the adults because they interpret their world more efficiently than the adults who look at their world from their rigid, learned perspective. Their views explain how the children have perceived the actions of the adults. Their view of Right and Wrong are different from the standards of the adults but the children have been forced to align with the limited scope of learned behaviour of the adults specially the teachers. When the adults give time to listen to the children and encourage them to bring out their creative ideas, they will be able to understand the desires and feelings of the children. For example, the version of the story; *Red Riding Hood* reveals their desire for parental love and security.

The study revealed that the ES students had innate ability to respond critically and creatively towards the content in the CL. However, when this ability is not fostered it may fade away in later life. Responses of the students to the poems and stories confirm that they learn about the good and the evil in the society from these stories. This learning helps them to encounter challenges in the world successfully. Prants (2009), has uncovered that CL was more effective in shaping the values and attitudes of a child than dictating the child with lists of rights and wrongs. Teachers have a great responsibility to provide opportunity for the students in the classroom to challenge ideas conveyed in the stories and poems and to think of alternative solutions or approaches to a problem presented in the stories. Great ideas for innovations are first conceived in the mind and if this is fostered from an early age, the world would have many productive and innovative citizens.

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