

Chapter 3

ANIMALS IN BOOKS FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: AN EXAMPLE OF JULIA DONALDSON BOOKS¹

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INTRODUCTION

Preschool period, which has a very important place in an individual's learning process, is the period to gain first experiences in many fields, make many discoveries related to the environment as a result of the intense sense of wonder and create awareness about the terms and concepts to be encountered during the education. Since the quality of the experiences in the first years of life directly affects the development and learning process, creating a supportive environment and ensuring that the child meets rich stimuli is very important and necessary for this period, when the sense of wonder is seen most intensely.

“Recent studies suggest that the environmental factor plays an important role, especially in early childhood” (Fontaine, Torre & Grafwallner, 2006). Therefore, the importance of the environment, one of the factors that affect development in the preschool period, must be taken into consideration and a suitable environment must be established for children. They must be provided with stimuli that will support their development processes. It is highly important to enable preschool children to learn by doing and experiencing, to have rich and meaningful lives, to participate in learning processes by using a large number of sensory organs, as well as ensuring that the preschool children encounter with books suitable for their developmental periods, helping them improve their perceptions about the world and life through such books and thus, supporting their school achievements. “Books are excellent learning tools for young children” (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011). While reading, children combine their previous knowledge with the information contained in the pictures and texts of the book; and they use appropriate processes to recognize basic con-

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Pringle and Lamme (2005) suggests that picture story books about animals will be very beneficial for children if they contain scientifically correct information. For this reason, it is an important responsibility for teachers to investigate how works of children's literature can be used in early childhood (Sackes, Trundle & Flevares, 2009).

Books cannot substitute for first-hand experiences to learn about animals, but allow students to get to know the world of animals that are not easy to reach (Pringle & Lamme, 2005). However, it also helps enrichment of their vocabulary to allow for development of their language skills. It is possible to say that Julia Donaldson books, which were examined within the scope of this study, are very important sources for reaching these goals. Accordingly, the following recommendations were developed:

- Preschool teachers should be encouraged to use, in their classrooms, such books, which include different animal genus in addition to widely known ones, and thus, enable children to look at the animal kingdom from a wider perspective and stimulate their sense of wonder.
- The parents who have children in preschool period should be informed about such books to increase their awareness.

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