

STORIES, TEENAGERS AND GRANDPARENTS

Marie PAVLOVSKÁ

Abstract: *The contribution presents the results of a survey research carried out in 2007–2008. Its goal was to find out if the teenage generation is interested in stories, in stories of their parents and grandparents, if they tell each other stories. We also compared the attitude of grandparents and teenagers to storytelling in regards the intergenerational relationships within the family.*

Keywords: *story, storytelling, teenager, grandparent, relationship between generations, narration*

Motto: *“Human mutuality emerges – among other things – when the young learn from the old and the old from the young.”*

Pestalozzi

In our culture, the storytelling is connected to the tradition of folk storytelling to the stories handed on from generation to generation by narration. „*The History of my grandma immediately relates to me. Her history is actually my history too.*“¹

The storytelling is absolutely essential in child development. The child is in contact with the narrator – which enables their mutual interaction. The child can immediately react to the storytelling, discuss the attitudes that they take within the story and which develops their communication skills, they learn to express their own views and take attitudes and evaluative judgements.

Child’s vocabulary is developed by stories, the stories support the imagination of the child, and they provide plenty of model situations from the real life full of characters which they children can identify with. The parent or grandparent provides sense of security, helps to find their way in the story and select the essentials for the life.

One day the children encounter the aspect of time. They understand that there is a time period, which they didn’t experience, that took place long before they were born. The adults call it history and this history is connected to more or less interesting characters. For children, the impersonation of history is mainly the grandparents. It’s above all them who can tell how thing used to be before. „Tell me how it used to be“, we hear children say to their grandmother or grandfather.

¹ Hausarová-Schoenerová, I. Děti potřebují prarodiče. Praha: Portál, 1996. s. 38. ISBN 80-71-78-105-3.

When grandparents talk about their childhood, their life, the children are mostly surprised that there are things missing that make up their daily life – they cannot imagine their life without a computer, VCR, TV or airplanes. They realize that once also their grandmother was a little girl with scratched knees and grandpa a boy with a sling. And at the same time the children see grandparents who have almost lived their life to the end and accomplished many great things.

Nowadays, when the traditional family ties are disrupted, **the role of the grandparents should gain on significance.** While the birth rate is still on the downhill, the relatives are strewn all over the world, the children turn into lonely beings even though they grow two or three together. In their primary social community they are little and helpless, they have no defender of their interests. It could be the grandparents who could alleviate the pressure experienced by this lonely generation. *“By all the indigenous people, who live on the pre-feudal level in democratic forms, the raising of children is left to the grandparents. Their experience is appreciated; they show the children their first skills. The grandparents know the social power of love, which is greatly present in grandparents.”*² **The children can learn from their grandparents that the mere strain to succeed is not enough.** The grandparents have usually already gone through the active stage of their lives or if they still work they are no longer concerned about their carrier. Even if they are not retired yet, they are quite clear about what they want to attain and there is no need to exert themselves. They can relax and turn to values that came too short in the fight for existence. They can direct the generation of grandchildren to a different lifestyle characterized by human mutuality.

The positive influence of the grandparents depends on how they themselves see their development and maturing, how they move between two poles – integrity and despair. *“To the same degree that they feel in integrity with themselves they can facilitate the inner equilibrium and sense of security to their grandchildren. This way they can become the crucial characters in forming the identity of young people. At the time, when young people encounter wide range of personal and social changes and come on shaky ground, they can experience the continuity thanks to their grandparents.”*³

The problem nowadays is the **missing intimate communication between children, parents and grandparents.** This claim is supported also by the survey carried out in the period between 2007 and 2008. The survey, we are to describe, was carried out in 2007-2008 first in the town and then – a year later – in the country. Its aim was to find out if the young generation living in the over-mechanized world is still interested in their parents' and grandparents' stories, if they learn from those stories, if they themselves share stories with their parents or grandparents.

The questionnaire was elaborated in two versions – for seniors and for primary school pupils, it contained 24 items. The basic sample set consisted of the members of two generations – grandparents and the primary school pupils. The sample set was created on the grounds of deliberate selection. We chose the grandparents that have grandchildren in primary school age. The primary school pupils were the second group. The total of 180 questionnaires was handed out, 120 of them were handed out to the teenagers, 60 to the senior citizens. The average age of the grandparents was 69,2; the average age of the pupils was 14,5 years. We handed out the questionnaires personally, explained them to the respondents and picked them up on the arranged date. The collection of data

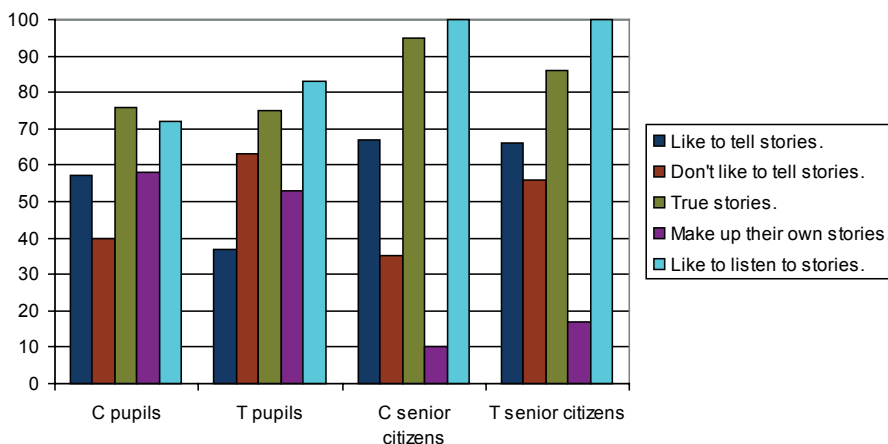
² Dirx, R. *Die Wiederentdeckung der Grosseltern.* Otto Maier Verlag, Ravensburg: 1976. s. 62. ISBN 3-473-41036-5

³ Hausarová-Schönerová, I. *Děti potřebují prarodiče.* Praha: Portál, 1996. s. 54. ISBN 80-7178-105-3.

was done by M. Pavlovská, K. Bednaříková, I. Hladká. Both parts of the questionnaire contained identical questions; they were only differently worded in consideration of the age of the respondents. There were 24 items focused at views and attitudes, 6 of them were closed dichotomous, 16 were dichotomous with the possibility of further explanation and two were closed ordinal questions. The data obtained were classified on the first grade level by the method of open coding.

Research statements and interpretation of the data obtained

Statement n. 1: Most of the primary school pupils don't think the storytelling is important. / Most of the senior citizens don't think storytelling is important.



Pupils

In case of pupils the statement n.1 didn't prove to be true. All pupils stated that they like stories, because they are interesting, instructive, they learn something new from them, they are good advice for life, the pupils rest listening to them.

59,1 % C = country, 62,3 % T = town, of the pupils don't tell stories, because they find it boring, they lack the vocabulary, imagination, they are shy. On the other hand 40,9 % C, 37,3 % T of the pupils tell stories "to tell others", or "if I find something interesting I share it with others", "you have to confide in somebody", "I like to amuse my friends."

Almost three fourths of the respondents (72,7 % C, 74 % T) like to listen to other people's stories, because they learn new things, they relax listening to the stories, they don't have to do anything "I enjoy the plot when I don't have to read", "I'm interested in other people's stories."

Everybody likes the stories which are known to have really happened to somebody. They are eager to know how the main character copes with the situation, sometimes they learn from the stories, when they are interesting. More than three thirds (77,3 % C, 76,2 % T) prefer real stories, because "...they are better elaborated, without too much director's fantasizing, they have more zest, they are told according to the truth, the ones that are made up are too artificial." Most of the respondents (90,9 % C, 83,2 % T) like to listen to a story told

by someone who really experienced the story, *“it is better; someone else could get it mixed up”, “I can ask about their feelings”, “it is easier to identify with them”.*

59,1 % pupils from C, 53,3 % from T, like to make up their own stories, because *“it is fun”* , *“...I like to thrill people”*, eight people wrote, that they themselves write stories. From the opposing answers: *“...I don't like to make them up, because I get it mixed up and can't make sense of it, “ I don't like lying”, “ I don't like it, I probably don't have imagination”, “it's sweat, why?”*

Senior citizens

In case of the senior citizens, the statement didn't prove to be true. Everybody likes stories because they are interesting, true *“...some of them are school of further life”*, you can learn a lot from them.

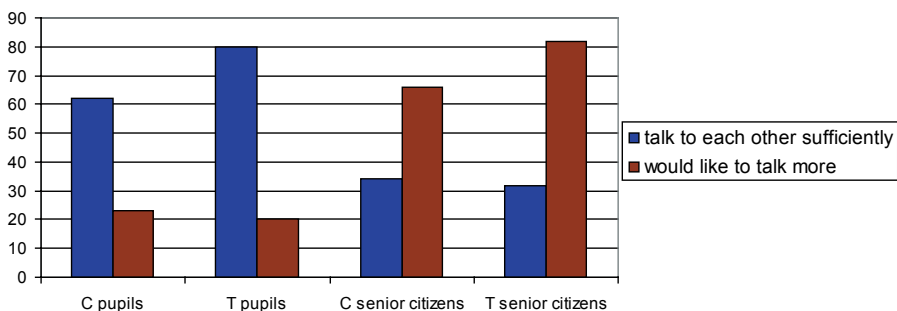
More than two thirds of the seniors like to tell stories to somebody, mostly to their grandparents, or if someone is interested they like to share their experience, *“... only when someone likes to hear them I don't impose myself.”* Almost one third of the senior citizens don't tell stories, because they *“don't know how”*, they think the stories aren't interesting. The same remark appeared 8 times, *“I'm sorry that the young generation doesn't believe what we went through.”*

All respondents like to listen to stories. The reasons are various: the stories are life advice, they like stories with happy ending, *“it shouldn't be rubbish”, “it is pleasant just to listen, to share somebody's story with them”*, *only when the storytelling has a form, otherwise I prefer written stories.”*

Most of the respondents prefer true stories (95,5 % C, 89 % T) for the representation of the true life in them, they can learn from them, they are more interesting and *“...always have the soul of the narrator.”* All of them prefer, when the story is told by someone, who directly experienced it, as *“... they can give a true record of the story”, “ for he authenticity of the story.”*

Most of the seniors don't like to think up their own stories, (90,9 % C, 83,2 % T), they claim to no longer have imagination and be realistic.

Statement n. 2: Most of the primary school pupils don't feel they meet and talk to their grandparents too little. / Most of the grandparents don't feel they meet and talk to their grandchildren too little.



Pupils

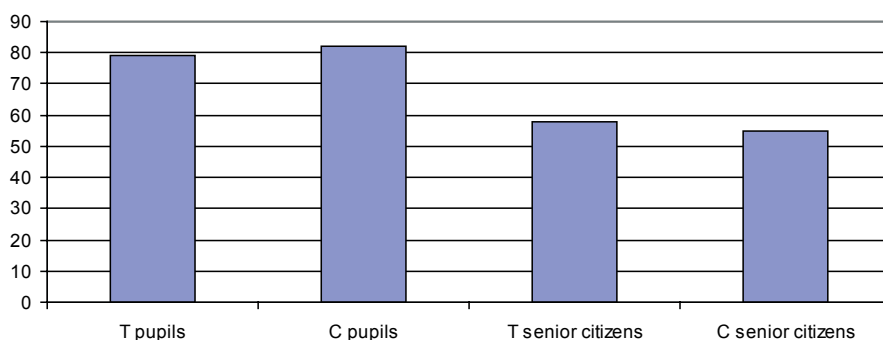
In case of the primary school pupils the statement proved to be true. Most of them (82% T, 63,6 % C) think that they talk to their grandparents sufficiently and don't want to spend more time talking to them. Only 20% T, 31,8 % C would like to talk to their grandparents more, but because they don't have enough time they say only the main things even though they have many more stories to tell. Among the answers why they don't want to talk, following utterances appeared: "...they don't understand it, they lived in different times", "they make fun of me afterwards", "grandma used it as a discouraging example, and therefore I tell her nothing anymore. "

Senior citizens

In case of senior citizens the statement didn't prove to be true. 64 % T, 63,6% C seniors thinks that they don't talk enough with their grandparents. 89 % T, 68,2 % C would like to talk more. The ones that gave this response, answered by following: "... the communication and thinking processes would increase", " they should know more about the past" or "...I wish they understood us and everything around more. From the negative answers: "the young have not enough time", "they have their own interests and certainly a different view of the events." Seven respondents felt they talk to their grandchildren enough.

Statement n.3: Most of the primary school pupils don't talk to their parents in the evening about their everyday worries and experiences. / When they were young most of the senior citizens didn't use to talk to their parents in the evening about their everyday worries and experiences.

Daily storytelling



Pupils

In case of the pupils, this statement didn't prove to be true. Roughly four fifths of the respondents (78,9 % T, 81,8 % C) tell their parents and grandparents what happened

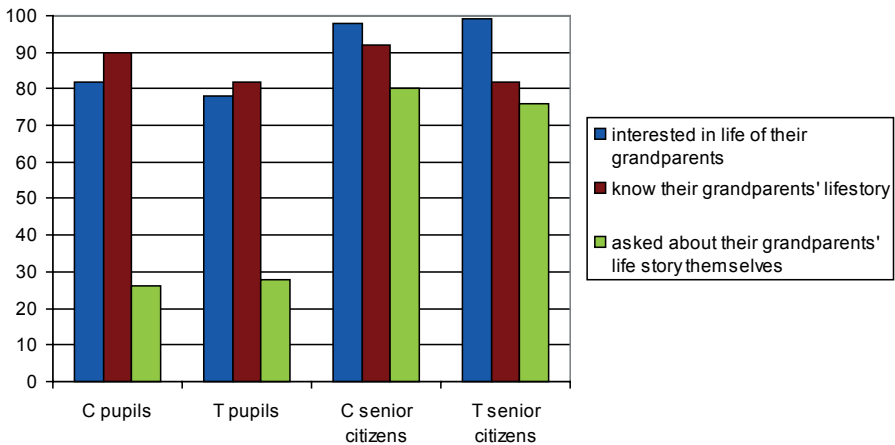
to them. Some of them say that parents and grandparents are interested in the stories of the pupils, or that they tell them stories that they can't resist telling. One respondent answered: " ...my talkativeness gets on their nerves."

The remaining fifth doesn't want to talk, because they don't feel like to, "...it's my business, they wouldn't like it", "they wouldn't really listen", "they would use it against me sometime later on."

Senior citizens

In case of the seniors the statement didn't prove to be true. More than a half (58,8 % T, 54,5 % C) stated that they had talked to their parents and grandparents about the things of the day. They told them only "acceptable" things, they wanted to appear interesting, get to be heard, "...I mostly talked to my mother about my results at school and sports", "my parents asked me, they were interested", "that was what we were really looking for, what everybody experienced." Less than a half (41,2%T, 45,5%C) didn't use to talk to their parents, because there was no time, they had field-work, chores, the parents weren't interested.

Statement n. 4: Most of the primary school pupils aren't interested in the stories of their parents and grandparents. / When they were children, most of the seniors weren't interested in stories of their parents and grandparents.



Pupils

This statement didn't prove to be true. More than four fifths of the respondents (79 % T, 81,8 % C) were interested in how their parents lived. Almost all 82,1 T, 90,9 % C respondents answered, that their parents and grandparents tell them stories from their youth. The pupils learned what their hobbies were, how they lived, "...it was quite different back then, interesting for us", "...to know if I'm like them", "good for the history class", "sometimes almost unbelievable", children are interested how their parents and grandparents lived, the children compare themselves to

their grandparents. In the negative answers they state, that their parents and grandparents compare what they had to do and the children don't have to, or "...I heard it at least hundred times."

Only 30 % T, 27,3 % C of the pupils ask their parents or grandparents to tell them a story, because they find it interesting. 70 % T, 72,7 % C don't ask, because the parents are busy: "...they should keep it to themselves, I won't persuade them", "who is supposed to listen to the rubbish?", "I prefer my PC", "I know everything by heart, I like listening to the music instead."

Senior citizens

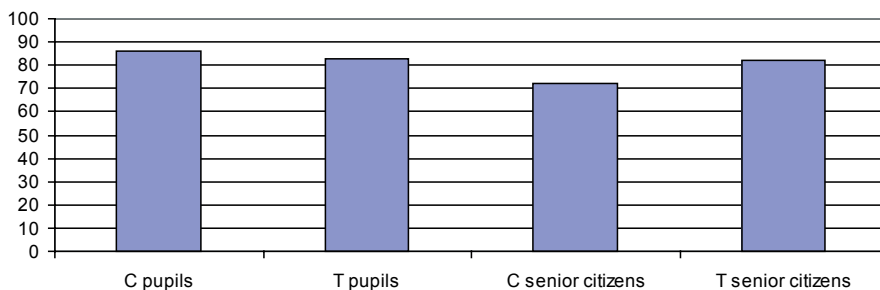
This statement didn't prove to be true. All respondents claimed to have been interested in how their parents lived. Almost all of them (84,3 % T, 95,5 % C) listened to the stories the parents told them about their childhood. The seniors state, that they were interested in their parents' childhood, they learned about the life their parents lived and admit that the life then was more modest, there were great differences in their and their parents' youth.

77 % T, 81,8 % C tell the grandchildren stories in order to let them know about their childhood and the life before.

82,3 % T, 63,6 % C asked their grandparents to tell them stories, because they were interested in their life, they were curious, "...the information was not available, there was no TV, the oral tradition was important", "the lights were out, we used to talk and tell each other stories", "the neighbours met and we talked."

Statement n.5: Most of the primary school pupils don't feel they could learn something from the stories of their parents or grandparents./ Most of the senior citizens don't feel they could learn something from the stories of their parents or grandparents.

I can learn something from the story



Pupils

In case of the pupils, the statement didn't prove to be true. 83 % T, 86,4 % C of the pupils think that they can learn something from their parents and grandparents.

Senior citizens

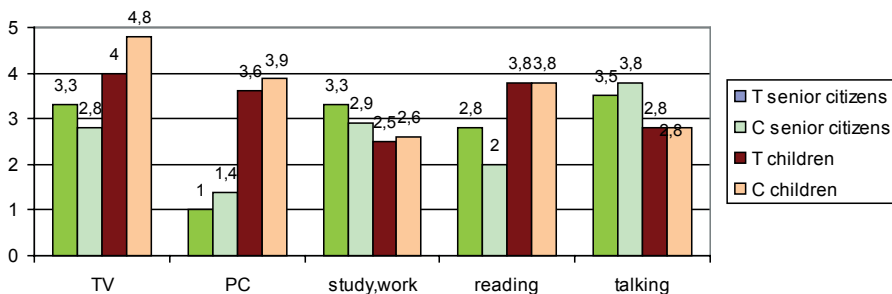
Also in case of the grandparents the statement didn't prove to be true. 82 % T, 72,7 % C of respondents believe to have learned from the stories of their ancestors.

Almost three fifths think that the young generation can learn from their stories: "... it is a school of life for them", "...they should learn to appreciate things they have", "...they should listen to us more and try to understand", "...they could take over our experience".

The rest of the grandparents think that the young generation doesn't care about their worries; they don't listen to them, because the times are different now.

Statement n.6: Most of the primary school pupils like the most to spend their free time in front of the TV. / Most of the senior citizens like to the most to spend their free time in front of the TV.

How do you spend your evenings at home?



Pupils

In case of the pupils the statement proved to be true. The children mostly spend their evenings at home in front of the TV (arithmetic mean 4,8 T, 4,0 C on a five point scale). The least time they spend reading (arithmetic mean 2,8 T, 2,0 C on a five point scale) and evening studies (arithmetic mean 2,6 T, 2,5 C on a five point scale).

Senior citizens:

In case of the senior citizens the statement didn't prove to be true. They mostly spend their evenings by reading (arithmetic mean 3,8 T, C on a five point scale) and the least time they spend in front of the PC (arithmetic mean 1,4 T, 1,0 C on a five point scale).

From the survey research, we came to the following conclusions:

1. Stories and storytelling is still important for the young generation. All young respondents wrote that they like stories and learn from them.
2. The grandparents think that fewer stories are told in the families nowadays than there were at the time of their childhood. This view is also supported by the

answers of the primary school pupils. The reason for this is the faster lifestyle connected to lack of time, greater distances between relatives, but also the fact that the young people nowadays prefer visual stories (e.g. movies).

3. Nowadays, the grandparents communicate with the grandchildren less than it was usual at the time of their childhood. Despite this fact the young generation thinks they spend enough time with their grandparents.
4. We didn't find any significant difference between the answers of the town and country respondents.

In the conclusion, we can state that the relationships between the two generations, i.e. the generation of the grandparents and grandchildren are subdued, but both generations are interested in each other, we can even say that they subconsciously feel that they can enrich each other, they only need to find the "right way" to approach one another.

PŘÍBĚHY, TEENAGEŘI, PRARODIČE

Abstrakt: V příspěvku jsou prezentovány výsledky výzkumného šetření z let 2007–2008, jehož cílem bylo zjistit, zda generace teenagerů jeví zájem o příběhy, o příběhy svých prarodičů či rodičů, zda sami příběhy vyprávějí, dále jsme porovnávali postoj generace teenagerů a prarodičů k vyprávění příběhů ve smyslu mezigeneračních vztahů v rodině.

Klíčová slova: příběh, vyprávění, teenager, prarodič, mezigenerační vztah, storytelling