

## Philosophical dialogues on Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales

### A case study of P4C manuals

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**philosophical dialogues on hans christian andersen's fairy tales: a case study of p4c  
manuals**

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**abstract**

In Denmark, teaching the famous fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen poses a challenge in primary education because cultural heritage status and oversimplified readings make it difficult to engage students in authentic readings. One strategy might be to use philosophical dialogues from the traditions of philosophy for children, because they offer student-centred approaches to teaching where students explore questions and ideas together, and where the teacher assumes the role not as authority, but as facilitator of the dialogue. This kind of dialogic teaching has been encouraged as especially suitable for literary education where teachers aim to engage students in reading the literature with an open mind. However, this article presents a comparative case study of P4C pioneer Per Jespersen's materials for philosophical dialogues and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, and our study gives reason for caution. We analysed the question design in the fairy tale manuals and compared them to the manuals for Jespersen's own stories, and found that the questioning design in the manuals for his own stories are generally much more focused and accessible, building on conceptually open questions. We argue that this indicates that despite its dialogic ideals, the design of the fairy tale manuals collapses under the weight of the cultural and historical impact of Hans Christian Andersen and his work in Denmark.

**keywords:** teaching materials; philosophical dialogue; per jespersen; hans christian andersen; fairy tales.

**diálogos filosóficos sobre los cuentos de hadas de hans christian andersen. un estudio de caso de manuales de fpn**

**resumen**

En Dinamarca, enseñar los famosos cuentos de hadas de Hans Christian Andersen plantea un desafío en la educación primaria porque el estatuto de 'herencia cultural nacional' de la producción de este autor y las lecturas simplificadas de sus textos dificultan que los estudiantes se comprometan en lecturas auténticas. Una estrategia podría ser utilizar diálogos filosóficos de la tradición de filosofía para niños y niñas porque ofrece un enfoque de enseñanza centrado en los estudiantes, en el que los estudiantes exploran preguntas e ideas juntos, y en el que el maestro o maestra asume su papel ya no como autoridad, sino como facilitador del diálogo. Este tipo de enseñanza dialógica se ha fomentado por ser especialmente adecuada para la educación literaria, en la que los y las

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docentes tienen como objetivo involucrar a los estudiantes en la lectura de la literatura con una mente abierta. Sin embargo, este artículo presenta un estudio de caso sobre los materiales preparados por un pionero en FpN, Per Jespersen, para diálogos filosóficos y cuentos de hadas de Hans Christian Andersen. Nuestro estudio da motivos para ser cautelosos. Analizamos el diseño de las preguntas en los manuales de cuentos de hadas y los comparamos con los manuales de las propias historias de Jespersen, y descubrimos que el diseño del cuestionamiento en los manuales para sus propias historias es, en general, mucho más enfocado y accesible, basándose en preguntas conceptualmente abiertas. Argumentamos que, a pesar de los ideales dialógicos, el diseño de manuales para cuentos de hadas cede ante el peso del impacto cultural e histórico de Hans Christian Andersen y su trabajo en Dinamarca.

**palabras clave:** materiales de enseñanza; diálogo filosófico; per jespersen; hans christian andersen; cuentos de hadas.

### **diálogos filosóficos sobre os contos de fadas de hans christian andersen. um estudo de caso de manuais de fpc**

#### **resumo**

Na Dinamarca, ensinar os famosos contos de fadas de Hans Christian Andersen representa um desafio na educação primária porque o status de herança cultural e leituras simplificadas tornam difícil envolver os alunos em leituras autênticas. Uma estratégia pode ser usar diálogos filosóficos das tradições da filosofia para crianças, porque eles oferecem abordagens centradas no estudante, em que eles exploram questões e ideias juntos, onde o professor assume o papel não como autoridade, mas como facilitador do diálogo. Este tipo de ensino dialógico foi fomentado por ser especialmente adequado para a educação literária, em que os professores visam envolver os estudantes na leitura da literatura com uma mente aberta. No entanto, este artigo apresenta um estudo de caso comparativo dos materiais produzidos por um dos pioneiros da FpC, Per Jespersen, para diálogos filosóficos e contos de fadas de Hans Christian Andersen. Nosso estudo dá motivos para ser cautelosos. Analisamos o *design* das perguntas nos manuais de contos de fadas e os comparamos com os manuais das próprias histórias de Jespersen, e descobrimos que o *design* de questionamento nos manuais de suas próprias histórias é geralmente muito mais focado e acessível, com base em questões conceitualmente abertas. Argumentamos que isso indica que, apesar de seus ideais dialógicos, o *design* dos manuais de contos de fadas desmorona sob o peso do impacto cultural e histórico de Hans Christian Andersen e sua obra na Dinamarca.

**palavras-chave:** materias de ensino; diálogo filosófico; per jespersen; hans christian andersen; contos de fadas.



philosophical dialogues on hans christian andersen's fairy tales: a case study of p4c  
manuals

*introduction*

Teaching literature is more than just teaching basic reading, and teachers usually aspire to provide students the opportunity to become engaged in reading great literary works. For this reason, literature requires other teaching strategies than nonfiction texts. One possible approach is through dialogical teaching which is seen by some as particularly suitable for teaching literature, because it involves personal experience and response (Nystrand & Gamoran 1991b; Nystrand 1997, p. 105-6; Boyd & Markarian 2011). It also provides an alternative to classical teacher led recitation, and previous research has shown that it has potential to engage students through cumulative questioning and discussion in a community of enquiry (e.g. Wells 1999; Nystrand 2006; Alexander 2017).

Such approaches seem especially called for in teaching well-known literary classics because these works are at risk of being eclipsed by their cultural status and by fixed notions of genre, meaning, or topic, leading to stale readings and interpretations. When this happens, otherwise important cultural heritage can be reduced to objects that are “idolized as relics”: becoming irrelevant for the present (Adorno 1992, p. 77) and not valuable enough to be passed on to future generations (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). For these reasons, literature education must attend carefully to works like *The Little Prince* (de Saint-Exupery 1943), *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll & Tenniel 1865) or the fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen.

These canonical works have in common that they are accompanied by predominant cultural narratives about, for instance, the author's biography or specific, static interpretations of “the true meaning” of the works. In teaching, it poses a significant challenge that both teacher and students will be aware of these narratives before the actual teaching situation, because the engagement with the literature will be affected by them. In this article, we maintain that biographical knowledge or static interpretations should not prevent authentic engagement with

literature, and we argue that P4C can help overcome this challenge. But our case analysis of teaching materials for Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales also demonstrates that the challenge is not trivial.

In Denmark, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales are an illustrative example of this risk of idolization, and previous research has shown that biography and stale interpretations weigh heavily on teaching materials on the fairy tales (e.g. Bom & Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2020). The worry is that this may undermine the teachers' ability to approach canonical literature with an open mind and may curtail the students' opportunity to become engaged in reading the literature. For this reason, a promising approach would be the philosophical dialogues used in Philosophy for Children (P4C). P4C is a diverse field but is generally characterized by being a highly student-centred and social form of teaching, which very often uses literature as a spring board (e.g. Wartenberg 2014; Murriss 2014; Goering 2014). More importantly, philosophical dialogue has long been used in teaching literature (e.g. Adler 1984; Pihlgren 2008), and in theory of education, the P4C approach has been used as intervention in empirical research on dialogic approaches to literature education (e.g. Reznitskaya & Glina 2013).

In this article, we present a case study of teaching materials made by Per Jespersen – the internationally known Danish practitioner of P4C. These materials contain the only collection of manuals made for philosophical inquiries about the fairy tales. But, despite his intentions, we argue that Jespersen does not succeed in designing teaching materials that avoid the challenges posed by Andersen's canonical and cultural status. Our analysis shows that Andersen's cultural impact on the manuals mean that not only do they perpetuate simplistic literary interpretations, they also make them veer away from Jespersen's own P4C ideals.

The article begins with an outline of main ideas, ideals and practices in philosophical dialogues with children and it explains why it is a promising approach to the didactic challenges in teaching Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. After this, the article provides a brief description of the challenges that Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales pose in literature education in Denmark and suggest that a dialogic approach can be helpful. Then we turn to the case study in

an analysis of Jespersen's teaching manuals for the fairy tales in the form of guides for philosophical dialogues. We conclude that the manuals fail to meet the dialogic ideals, and that this is worth noting for both practitioners within P4C, teachers in literary education, and researchers working with dialogic teaching approaches.

### *dialogic aspects of p4c*

P4C is a very diverse field and discussions of aims and strategies are abundant (Vansielegheem & Kennedy 2011; Väitalo, Juuso & Sutinen, 2016). But from the perspective of theory of education, the various traditions are arguably all characterized by being highly dialogic forms of teaching. They share the ideals of being children centred (e.g. in allowing ask much time as possible for children to talk and letting the children determine the direction of the dialogue), community centred (e.g. in encourage peer dialogue and joint effort to think in a community of inquiry) and substantiated by reasoning (e.g. providing arguments and justification for ideas). P4C seeks to create a community for creative thinking, explaining and comparing ideas among peers, not to teach children about philosophy. The facilitator helps the dialogue move on without steering the content or aiming at specific learning objectives other than those connected to being engaged in the 'philosophizing' (Smith 2017; Gregory, Haynes et al. 2017).

One of the ways in which P4C helps achieve dialogic teaching ideals described in theory of education, is by inviting genuinely open inquiries concerned with 'authentic questions' without fixed answers, and with 'uptake' of students' contributions into the conversation (Nystrand & Gamoran 1991a; Boyd & Markarian 2011). Another reason is that the teacher facilitates a dialogue among the students instead of, as in classical teaching, conducting a recitation in the form of a question from the teacher, followed by a response from a student, which the teacher then provides feedback on (Lyle 2008; Alexander 2017).

While the facilitator must engage the participants in the dialogue and make sure that it remains focused, it is important not to steer it in a specific direction by, for instance, asking leading questions, adding content, or assuming the role of authority on truth. There are many views on facilitation and questioning strategies

in P4C (Mendonça & Costa-Carvalho 2019, p. 8-12), and much effort has been put into providing useful tools. However, there is no agreement on, for instance, whether opening questions should be prepared in advance or posed by the children, or how to frame follow up questions. Some recommend starting with prepared, simple, conceptually open questions, before moving on to more difficult, deep philosophical questions (Worley 2015), and some build on “The Question Quadrant” which offers the facilitator questions about reading comprehension and knowledge as well as open questions (Cam 2006). Yet, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between kinds of questions (e.g. Weber & Wolf 2017, p. 79; Kohan 2014, p. 40]), but the important thing is that all questions should help deepen the inquiry without steering the direction.

There is a long tradition within philosophy for children of working with picture books and children's literature and hundreds of guiding manuals have been made available. Some books and manuals have been designed specifically for philosophical inquiries, while other manuals are guides to how already existing books can be used as stimuli. Good books for inquiries are often rich in extreme characters, concepts and narratives that allow for inquiries into meaning and conceptual questioning (Murriss 2016, p. 5; Haynes & Murriss 2017). Offhand, the choice of canonical literature such as Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales for philosophical dialogues appears obvious, so it is not surprising that there are other guides for his fairy tales among the many P4C manuals.<sup>3</sup> However, in contrast to Jespersen's materials, some of the other guides we have identified appear to take the fairy tales as a stimulus for philosophical dialogue rather than using the P4C approach to help students and teachers engage with the literary content.

### *hans christian andersen's fairy tales in traditional teaching materials*

Hans Christian Andersen is known world-wide as the author of fairy tales like “The Little Mermaid” (1837), “The Emperor's New Clothes” (1837) and “The

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, resources from The Prindle Institute for Ethics <https://www.prindleinstitute.org/teaching-children-philosophy/> and from Center for Philosophy for Children at <https://www.philosophyforchildren.org/resources/questions-library/>. The sites offer manuals for the fairy tales *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Emperors New Clothes*.

Ugly Duckling” (1843). The fairy tales are cultural heritage in Denmark and Danish children will usually be introduced to Andersen’s fairy tales from an early age. And as the cultural perception of Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark includes narratives about his biography, the most repeated biographic details are likely to be familiar to students in advance . In education, Andersen is part of the politically initiated Canon of Danish Literature, a collection of selected authors whose texts are obligatory readings in both primary and secondary education. This almost makes knowledge of Hans Christian Andersen and his fairy tales a ‘cultural a priori’ in Denmark.

Furthermore, as many teaching materials for the fairy tales reproduce these familiar perceptions of Andersen and his works, they are largely characterized by oversimplified interpretations and powerful myths surrounding his biography and his works (Bom & Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2020). This results in fixed readings with little room for student voices and engagement. In addition, fairy tales as a genre are generally seen as children’s literature, and these circumstances taken together poses a challenge for teachers to engage students in Andersen’s works: They think they already know them, they see them as something for little children, and they know that they have to have them on the curriculum (again). This makes it hard to create learning situations which invite immersion and the possibility of non-standard interpretations of the stories.

The oversimplified standard interpretations of Andersen and his fairy tales include the misconceptions that Andersen is a moralizing author and that his biography holds the key to interpreting his works (Bom & Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2020), while, in fact, they “give room for statements and convictions to stay in a tension, an undecidedness, instead of settling in an unequivocal view of the world” (Thomsen 2017, p. 63). But the misconceptions are abundant in prevalent teaching materials which contains passages such as “The moral of the fairy tale is that everyone will become what they were created to be”, or where a learning goals is: ‘I can identify parallels between the story in a fairy tales and the author’s life’ (see for these examples).



Accordingly, if literature education aims to avoid reducing Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales (and similar literary heritage) to a perpetuation of predominant cultural perceptions of them, alternative teaching strategies are needed, with materials that avoid the simplistic readings and make room for authentic student engagement in teaching Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, and the pedagogic ideals of philosophical dialogues offers a promising framework. But as the following case study shows, the curbing effect of the cultural and historical load on dialogic ideals should not be underestimated.

*case study: jespersen's dialogue manuals for andersen's fairy tales*

Per Jespersen (1938-2011) was a trained teacher in the subject Danish and a key figure and pioneer within Danish Philosophy for Children (Hinge 2016, p. 205-6). He began his work with P4C in Danish schools in the 1970s. He has written session guides, produced two short films, and published several books on teaching Danish literature and on P4C (e.g. Jespersen 1988; Jespersen 1993). His approach is one of six examples mentioned on the website of the international organization ICPIC which is the largest and most influential association of researchers and practitioners across P4C traditions. On ICPIC's site<sup>4</sup>, his approach is described as one that 'draws on the tradition of storytelling'.

In 2005, Jespersen wrote dialogue manuals for some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. The manuals appear to have been published in book form in Ecuador, but 11 manuals are also available online on his personal website (Jespersen 2005). In an interview, Jespersen explains that they were written to mark Andersen's bicentennial anniversary, for teachers who want to use P4C in the classroom (Naji 2017, p. 146). Jespersen's website also contains essays on P4C such as 'Redemptional Pedagogics', 'Talking Philosophy With Small Children' and 'What is philosophy for children?' (Jespersen n.d.-c). These essays contain the same views and ideas that Jespersen shared in his Danish publications, and in the interview mentioned.

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.icpic.org/about-us/>

Jespersen highlights the importance of a student oriented and open approach: 'In P4C, the teacher is not the man/woman who knows everything – on the contrary, he/she is mediator of the dialogue going on in the classroom' and 'The typical Danish version is that the manual does not try to take the students to a certain conclusion' (Naji 2017, p. 143). This is on par with Jespersen's earlier descriptions of ideals in philosophical dialogue where he has also elaborated on the importance of ignorance: 'If we see it in a Socratic way and assume that ignorance is the starting point of wonder in people, then we have a grip on what counts as a philosophical class room dialogue' (Jespersen 1988, p. 68, our translation). Furthermore, he writes that the teacher should not feel compelled to follow a teaching manual closely. Instead, the questions can be introduced if the dialogue gets derailed, but a text is full of possibilities and together with the students the teacher should find the things in the story that motivate (Jespersen 1988, p. 89-90).

In Jespersen's guides to Andersen's fairy tales, there are, nevertheless, many examples of framings of the teacher as someone who is looking for correct answers. Moreover, these answers appear to be closely linked to the myths that Andersen's biography is the key to the 'true meaning' of his work and that the fairy tales are vehicles of moral education. The ideal of an open-minded dialogue is also undermined by the manuals' high level of thematic complexity and questions that are leading, very difficult to answer, and/or conceptually closed.

In the following sections, we will substantiate this assessment of Jespersen's approach by evaluating his Hans Christian Andersen manuals in the light of the ideals that he has presented. This examination is important in itself, because manuals should be aligned with their purposes, but it is also of crucial interest for possible future uses of philosophical inquiries as dialogic and open approaches to the fairy tales. After this, we compare the manuals to some of Jespersen's other manuals in order to assess whether his Andersen manuals are typical of his material design or not. This can provide us with knowledge about the cultural impact of Andersen's authorship status on teaching materials.

### *framing the fairy tales: biographism and moralism*

In the manuals for the fairy tales (Jespersen 2005), Jespersen uses Andersen's biography to frame the philosophical questions on several occasions. In this way, Jespersen indirectly communicates the hegemonic myth about an inevitable link between Andersen as a person and the content of his fairy tales, and that this link must be used as an interpretative tool. In the manual for "The Tinderbox" (1835) for example, Jespersen frames this question: 'It has been foretold that the princess should marry a soldier. Foretold by whom?' Seen in isolation, this question is somewhat puzzling. It is not concerned with fact checking (since the story does not mention who does the foretelling) or literary interpretation, and it does not prepare the ground for philosophical discussion. The follow-up question in the manual turns to Andersen's biography: 'When Hans Christian Andersen was fourteen, he went with his mother to a fortune teller, who told him that he was going to be famous. Is there a connection between his own life and this story?'

This leading question appears to take for granted that Andersen's personal childhood experience is the key to a correct interpretation of the fairy tale. This and similar references to biographical information has as a result that the person Andersen quite frequently becomes the focal point of the inquiries at the expense of the fairy tales. In the manual for the story "A Rose from Homer's Grave" (1842), some of the questions suggested are: 'What would Hans Christian Andersen's reaction to the Harry Potter story be?' and 'Would Hans Christian Andersen's tales have been written the same way, if he had lived today?'. And in the manual for "The Bell" (1845), the question 'So it is better to stay a child?' is followed by 'Do you think that Hans Christian Andersen felt that?'. With such questions, children are invited to speculate on the psychology of Andersen rather than to get involved in a philosophical dialogue based on the fairy tales.

The manuals' emphasis on biographical anecdotes and psychology is also closely linked to a focus on Andersen's own voice and assumed intention with the fairy tales. Here, the voice projected on Andersen is significantly more moralistic and definitive than the fairy tales in themselves. The question 'What is Hans Christian Andersen's point with this story?' occurs in several manuals, and the

conviction that Andersen has a strong moral voice is also clearly communicated in this section from the manual for the fairy tale “Mother Elder” (1850):

- If there is some being, following us all the time: is that our destiny? [sic!]
- So that your destiny follows you all the time?
- Do you believe that?
- Well, Hans Christian Andersen did.

Here, Jespersen suggests that a specific moralistic interpretation of Andersen’s personal conviction is presented to the pupils by the teacher as part of the dialogue. Such practice gives the simplistic, hegemonic and moralistic perceptions of the person Hans Christian Andersen a pivotal role in the inquiries. And not only does it offer a highly limited literary reading of the canonical literature, it is also in clear conflict with the ideal that inquiries should not lead students to specific conclusions.

### *dialogue and question design: authority and steering*

This brings us to the other significant challenge in Jespersen’s manuals, namely the positions and roles implicitly laid out for teacher and students, because the manuals point towards very teacher centred activities. They comprise many questions, the questions are often intricate, conceptually closed and/or leading, and they often appear to function as tests of the students’ recollection of the narrative. This section will provide examples of each of these features.

First, the manual for each fairy tale is packed with questions and themes. The 11 manuals we have access to contain an average of 48 questions for each fairy tale and they cover a range of different subjects. In the manual for the fairy tale “The Swineherd” (1841), for instance, the themes suggested include arranged marriages, objects with symbolic value, nature vs. man-made things, temptation, and strengths vs. weakness. The number and complexity of themes and the number of questions poses a risk of significant teacher influence on the content and direction of the dialogue, and this could have as a result that a substantial proportion of the speaking time remains with the teacher, especially if the teacher

is used to traditional teaching or less familiar with the dialogical approach in P4C.

Second, it is striking that many of the questions are very difficult to answer. Arguably, questions such as 'Are there no borders between fantasy and reality for a child?' or 'Can Death be sent down to Earth by God?' will be beyond the grasp of most students (and people in general), not because they are hard philosophical questions that suggest complex answers, but because they are questions that would require detailed knowledge of empirical psychology (in the first case) or that simply are unanswerable (in the second case). For these reasons, such questions are not ideal if the aim is to involve students in a dialogue focused on the content of the fairy tales.

Third, there are many examples of questions that appear to be open but turn out to be closed. In the manual for "Little Ida's Flowers" (1835), for instance, Jespersen writes: 'The student uses his fantasy to the utmost. How would we be without fantasy? If there were no fantasy in the world, Hans Christian Andersen would not have written any fairy tales!' In this passage, an open question is followed by a statement about Andersen that inevitably leads the children to the one conclusion that a world without fantasy would be terrible. Thus, the seemingly open question 'How would we be without fantasy?' turns out to be conceptually closed. In the manual for the fairy tale "The Last Pearl" (1853), Jespersen presents a similar strategy in the following passage:

- Is The Guardian Spirit the same as God?
- Does each of us have a guardian angel of our own?
- Therefore, God and his many guardian angels do communicate.
- Is that the way it is?
- So we have a world with one Guardian Spirit and many guardian angels.

In this example, the manual suggests a flow of thoughts leading to the final (rather controversial) answer that every human has a guardian spirit and guardian angels.

Fourth, many of the questions are leading. In a passage of the manual to "The Swineherd", Jespersen writes the following about the kitchen-pot:

- It can play (an old German tune) and show you which kind of food is made in every house in town.
- *Would it not be amazing?*
- Imagine that you could even hear every word spoken in every house!!
- *Would it not be fabulous?*

Again, not much room is left for the students' own ideas and opinions: The questions lead to one possible answer – yes – and they don't invite further elaborations.

Fifth, a lot of the questions are focused on specific facts and events in the narratives. These questions from the manual for the fairy tale "Mother Elder" illustrates this:

- How does the man explain the stories coming to him?
- What happens in the tea-pot?
- What are the elderly people talking about?
- Why do they think back on their childhood?
- Where did they go in the afternoon?

These questions can neither be characterized as philosophical nor as directed to literary interpretation. Instead, they are suited to check whether the students have listened properly to the story, have done their reading homework, and whether they are ready to be tested in them. With such questions, the teacher assumes the role of authority on truth, while the students are positioned as individuals who must be steered and instructed and supervised by the teacher. And while close readings will be an indispensable part of engagement with the literature, the teacher must be careful that the students understand the difference between these questions. Especially given most students' experiences with traditional teaching approaches.

We argue that if these manuals were to be used by a teacher with little knowledge of P4C, it could create a rather stressful situation for the students instead of providing a space for thoughts and ideas. The mix between fact-

checking oriented questions and big existential questions like 'Would the world change if we were all willing to sacrifice for others? Is this the heart of Christianity?' does not offer a clear purpose or frame for the philosophical dialogue. Is the teacher looking for specific answers? Are the students expected to know them? How? And what if they don't? Normally, these are not questions of concern in philosophical inquiries.

### *question design in jespersen's other manuals*

As a conclusion of this case study, it is useful to compare Jespersen's manuals for Andersen's fairy tales with manuals written by Jespersen for other stories. Some of his stories and questions are available in English under the titles *Deeptales* (Jespersen n.d.-a) and *Mark and Deena* (Jespersen n.d.-b) and like the fairy tale manuals, they are written for teachers to be used in classroom settings. The Danish versions of the *Mark and Deena* stories (*Kim og Marianne* in Danish) are written in the 80s, but the English version appears to be published online around the same time as the fairy tale manuals. But as this section will show, these other manuals have a question design which is vastly different from those for Andersen. The questions for Jespersen's own stories are generally conceptually open, accessible and more focused.

There are eight stories in all in *Deeptales* and eight in the *Mark and Deena* selection. The manuals contain almost 300 questions, which makes the average per story around 18 questions. Most of the stories have one or two main themes (such as 'time' or 'wisdom'). This is in contrast with the manuals for Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales that had far more questions and themes for each story.

The question designs also differ. Of the 292 questions we have counted in the manuals, 112 are genuinely open, philosophical questions with simple phrasing, such as 'What is art?' or 'Is responsibility an emotion?' The rest of the questions are either in conflict with ideals of philosophical dialogue or not philosophical (but not in conflict with dialogic ideals). The 'neutral' non-philosophical questions are often about the children's own experiences and life (such as 'Have you felt stress?' or 'Is there art in your school?'). Even though they

are not philosophical, these questions are simple and do not presuppose a specific answer and so they can be used to invite the children to share their thoughts.

The non-ideal questions include 24 questions that are concerned with facts about the narrative (such as 'What is the professor's work?' or 'What did the priest do in the tree?') and 23 questions that are too complex and difficult to be ideal (such as 'Mom says that we all have our secrets. That we will never grow mature without secrets. Is this secret what we would call the soul?' or 'We have free will. What can destroy it?'). Of the 23 complex questions, 10 are also very leading (such as: 'How can God create so much difference? The clue is: if we were all alike, life would be boring, and we would have nothing to talk about.'). In all, 26 of the questions are very leading (such as: 'Do trees make wars? Do flowers?' or 'I must admit that I think, that happiness and love is more important than marriage. Do you disagree?'). It should be noted however, that the distribution of ideal and non-ideal questions is very uneven across the manuals, because two of the 16 manuals contain half the complex and leading questions.

It seems fair to conclude that the manuals for Andersen's fairy tales differ vastly from those for *Deeptales* and the *Mark and Deena* stories. Style and wording make it obvious that they are all written by the same author (Jespersen's fondness of rhetorical, enthusiastic questions, such as 'Isn't it a fantastic story?' or 'Isn't it amazing?' is noticeable (these examples are from the manual 'Yellowness' in the collection, Jespersen n.d.-a) is noticeable). But, the questioning design for his own stories is generally much more focused, accessible, and build on conceptually open questions. This makes these manuals much more aligned with the ideals Jespersen advocated in writings and interviews, and the contrast to the fairy tale manuals is unmistakable.

### *concluding remarks*

The shortcomings of Jespersen's teaching materials may seem surprising, as there are good reasons to think that philosophical dialogues could provide a novel and fruitful approach to the fairy tales. It had been noted that in a P4C approach to literature, "There is no hierarchy of who counts as 'novice' or 'expert'



reader" (Haynes & Murriss 2017, p. 177). We suggest that this flat hierarchy in P4C can allow students to engage in deeper reflection on the literature's content and potential. The idea of using philosophical dialogue for literature education is well-known, but there is reason for caution when the literature is canonical cultural heritage.

On the backdrop of Jespersen's dialogic ideals, experience, and other manuals in the field of philosophy for children, his manuals must be read as an illustrative example of the challenge that canonical literature such as Hans Christian Andersen's poses in education. Previous research on teaching the fairy tales has pointed to difficulties in breaking free from fixed readings of canonical authorships in education, and our study confirms this by showing that this challenge also confronts this P4C approach despite its highly dialogic ideals.

For both practitioners in P4C and literature teachers, our analysis of Jespersen's manuals should give reason to pause and realize the pressure the 'cultural a priori' exerts on literary education. It is striking that even someone who has spent a lifetime defending dialogic ideals can fall prey to stereotypical thinking and let the literary works be eclipsed by cultural heritage and simplistic interpretations. It does not mean that the dialogic approach is futile, but it shows that questions should be chosen carefully. In the case of Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark, question design should take into account the challenges that predominant interpretations of his biography and works poses for open-minded approaches to the fairy tales.

Attempts have been made in Denmark to avoid this well-known problem related to the fairy tales. For instance, the Hans Christian Andersen Museum in Odense works with an approach inspired by P4C and have designed dialogues guides aiming to elicit literary reflection (Kiilerich & Mogensen 2020) and a recent research paper outlines a similar suggestion (Bom & Schaffalitzky de Muckadell 2019). Internationally, there is a discussion guide for "The Emperor's New Clothes" which is very close to the ideal manual design we envision here (Mudryk 2020).



There is of course an important underlying discussion about how to balance the philosophical and literary content in facilitation, but we suggest that the knowledge and experiences accumulated in P4C traditions could provide a much needed dialogic batting ram in teaching Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales in Denmark. We do not mean to suggest that it will be possible to overcome the challenges completely: As long as the fairy tales are considered to be of great cultural value, this will always entangle them in a cultural context and value system. But we can be critically aware of this status when we design teaching materials.

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