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**IMPACT OF CARTOONS ON CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE  
LEARNING ABILITIES AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

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*Abstract*

I don't think there is a teacher, either from preschool, primary or gymnasium, who didn't use the cartoons in the class lessons. I also don't think there is a child who hasn't enjoyed watching an animated movie or cartoon programs as a child. We must recognize that this fact is considered normal nowadays. Psychologist Karen Philip, cited by the Spanish daily El Pais, is alarming about a lot of dangers to which the children are exposed when they are allowed to watch cartoons for hours. On the other hand there are also psychologists who argue that cartoons can provide opportunities for development in terms of narrative and linguistic skills. The American journalist Ron Suskind, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1995, had published in 2014 "*Life, Animated "A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*". It is an autobiographical book in which the author relates and explains how Disney movies helped his autistic child develop communication skills and gradually interact with the outside world and family members. Two years after the publication of this work, director Roger Ross Williams made it possible to produce a documentary film about the life of an autistic child Owen Suskind and the role Disney had in giving him means to understand his feelings and interpret reality and finally recovering Autism. So in this article we will study all the mechanisms through which both animated cartoons and animation films can help parents and teachers in language education, development of emotional intelligence and cognitive capacities of children.

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**Keywords:** Language, cartoons, emotional intelligence, autism, emotions.



## 1. Introduction

The idea of recreating the illusion of movement through a series of drawings is older than the birth of cinema. French scientists Azema and Rivère in a study published in 2012 concluded that representations of several-legged animals, heads and tails, discovered in several caves in France, can be considered as the early precursors of cinema. Prehistory artists used a number of skillful techniques to create the impression that drawings come to life with the help of flame-changing light. Other later discoveries in Egypt and Greece confirm this tendency to represent different phases of motion in their art. The first known attempt is an image animation that dates back to 1640 when Athanasius Kircher invented the first projector of the image, called the *Magic Lantern*, which managed to project different consecutive phases of the movement with the help of a concave mirror behind a light source to direct as much light as possible through a small rectangular glass sheet (a slide), which was the image to be projected and then into a lens at the front of the device. The lens has been adjusted to optimally focus the slide plan at the distance of the projection screen, which could simply be a white wall, and therefore formed an enlarged image of the slide on the screen. The world of animation struck a little bit on the spot until 1824 when Peter Mark Roget, through his work *Explanation of an optical deception in the appearance of the spokes of a wheel when viewed through vertical apertures*, explains the illusion of moving objects and is considered an important point in the history of the film and influenced the development of the *thaumatrope* and *kaleidoscope*. Although there were several inventions based on the principle of persistence of images on the retina, it was only in 1831 that Plateau Antoine Joseph invented the *phenakistoscope*, being a device that generates moving images and is based on the principle of retinal retention, which is the basis of the cinematographic technique of today. All this information comes to support the development of the cinema industry from the earliest times to the present. What seems natural to us today has been through much work from those before us. We cannot say that what they have created is of no use to us today. That is why I thought to remember these fantastic achievements before coming into the subject of this work.

## 2. Problem Statement

And yet where do the prehistoric people want to watch such painted images? For what purpose did they use them? Was it then considered a mean of relaxation? These questions cannot be answered without the opinion of historians, but we can refer to what animation films and movies are today.

Although at first the cinema was considered to be only a means of entertainment, a space in which people can have a moment of relaxation in everyday life, today we can consider it as an educational but also therapeutically means. In the early years of production, Disney's films had the central objective of reproducing social criticism in a comic way and only after a few years began to address children. Since the approach to social issues has been partly ignored, their commercial side has begun to develop. For this purpose, screenings had "good" and "bad" stories, cute characters and stories with a happy ending.

## 3. Research Questions

When critics of children's cinema and followers of this type of entertainment began to recognize the influence of screenings on self-esteem, authority, identity and social security, schematization of prototypes and stereotypes, the following questions were born: Are Disney movies suitable for children? What lessons

are the children in animation films and the positive and negative effects of animated films for their formation in society?

Referring to the second stage of child development, defined by Piaget as "Preoperative Thinking," the child acquires a set of basic knowledge by interacting with their own environment and experiences, and these things express them in words and images (Piaget, 1985). Around this issue arose the question: how does these films help in the pre-operational process or, on the contrary, prevent it? There is a defensive tendency for many parents to think that cartoons have "nothing wrong", and that in their realization the advice of a team of writers and psychologists has been asked and therefore does not consider them to be detrimental to the development of children. Basically, we can say there are two types of cartoon viewers. The first type of viewer combines watching television with related activities, such as school or relaxing tasks. The second type of viewer focuses exclusively on the screen and is indifferent to what is happening around it. The number of hours the child is in front of the TV has its consequences. If they are called to the table and do not answer, if they are asked a question and do not answer, if they are bedtime and insist on lulling in front of the small screen, it would be a good time to step in. So, are Disney movies suitable for children? What lessons are the children in animation films and the positive and negative effects of animated films for their formation in society?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

We tend to think that "there is nothing wrong" because they are designed and written especially for the little ones, however, despite this, they can have negative effects. Thus, excessive consumption of animated series is associated with states of anxiety, creative disability, aggression, and the search for different sensations and emotions. The emotional impact of cartoons is based on what's on the screen. In many cases, these feelings are negative, such as pain and anger. Violence is also worrying and animated cartoons, in many cases, do not miss these scenes. So this theoretical study aims to:

- To analyze the influences of cartoons on children with autism to see cartoon programs.
- To ascertain the effect of cartoon programs and behavioural changes among children.
- To suggest better ways and means to modify the behaviour of cartoon viewers.

#### **5. Research Methods**

We conceived this article from a theoretical perspective. Although there are quite a lot of theoretical and research studies focusing on the impact of cartoons in language education, development of emotional intelligence and children's cognitive capacities, I have noticed that very little is known about the documentary *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*. I intend to address this subject in order to make this success known, which can be the basis of relevant research in the field.

##### **5.1. Negative effects of cartoons and animation movies on children's language learning abilities, social, moral and emotional intelligence development**

In 2004, the American psychologist Stevie Hossler from Bowling Green University published a study according to which a child watches from the first contact with the TV until the end of the high school about 18,000 hours. (Hossler, et al. 2004), Also about the negative effects of watching violent entertainment

programs, surgeon Satcher presented in 2001 a report on adolescent violence in which he found that the aggressive behaviour in young children is often caused by violent television programs. Giroux and Pollock (2018). said that Disney movies have become a teaching tool in building culture, values and ideals that resemble the traditional ways of acquiring these attributes, such as school and family. Unlike what he says, Palacios (2011) argues that the viewer of cartoons risks confusing reality with fiction, learning negative stereotypes, mimicking the negative behaviour of some characters.

On the other hand, the return to fulfilling daily obligations and returning to everyday life can lead to certain adaptive dysfunctions. So, if they spend the day watching cartoons, kids can get to assimilate that how to solve problems by superheroes is also justified in real life, trying to use the same "power" of their favourite characters. Imitation may seem harmless when the child wants to wear a suit like the one his idol uses, but we must pay attention to those moments in which he behaves as if he really was. As parents and teachers, we should know the psychological effects of the animated series on our children. Reducing the number of hours in front of the screen, encouraging other activities and explaining that the characters are not real are some of the commitments we must take to avoid further serious problems in the future. Although there is no consensus on the time a child can spend watching cartoons or television programs in general without harm, studies show that ideally it should not exceed sixty minutes a day. Not only possible acts of violence become harmful to small viewers, but their language is also affected by these entertainment programs, often inadequate for their age or use of expressions erroneously. Overexposure to watching these entertainment programs can also be a source of anxiety in children that affects creative skills and encourages children to experience emotions and potentially dangerous sensations for their physical and mental health.

## **5.2. Positive effects of cartoons and animation movies on children's language learning abilities, social, moral and emotional intelligence development**

Although some of these entertainment programs can create some malfunctions in intellectual, emotional and behavioural development, we cannot help but remember their positive effects. Animated cartoons have played a role in the development of children since the beginning of the 20th century. While watching cartoons, the brain processes, graphics, colours, educational information, etc. However, the child lives in a fantastic world through his daily games and activities. This need for fantasy will help him to form his true personality, develop his imagination, sensitivity, feelings and moral consciousness of what is right or wrong. Cartoons are not the only way children relax or waste their time; they can be useful tools for learning and developing creativity. Even more, it is said that when kids have fun they learn faster and better, and animated bands combine them in an exceptional way. Animated lanes can be a means of learning the rules, concepts and attitudes that they have learned from their favourite heroes, but remember that it is the task of parents to control and manage all this information to educate the right values. Another benefit that we can find in watching cartoons is stimulating learning. Animation films and animated tapes help teachers build and reach the objectives of educational programs and also help students achieve high levels of learning.

The research conducted by Robert Gill in 1970 found that students who used cartoon characters had learned more than students who used the same material without animated performance. Research indicates that using cartoons as classroom material stimulates the child's motivation, learning and social development. Repeated use of the same cartoon characters helps children feel comfortable expressing their

feelings and desires and wishes, improving their social skills. Our children's feelings can be developed through drawings, because when the "good" character wins, they will feel pleasure and joy, and when someone becomes ill, will empathize and feel pity. In early childhood, up to 5 or 6 years, we can opt for stories, drawings or games that help them learn new concepts and things, for example, hours, numbers, days of the week, etc. From the age of 6, experienced feelings, moral and social norms will be embedded in the development of children, and friendship, tolerance, understanding, etc. are fundamental principles that need to be modelled. Repeated use of the same cartoon characters helps children feel comfortable expressing their feelings and desires and wishes, improving their social skills.

Cartoons are not only a form in which children relax or take the leisure time at their disposal. It can be a useful tool for learning and developing creativity. The interactive environment in which cartoons take place helps children learn faster and learn some skills and competencies. It helps them easily assimilate information with images. Because it is also a fun and relaxing method for children, cartoons help to increase the motivation of children to learn more and as a learning tool to their liking, children will be more keen to learn new things through drawings. The speed in thinking is also trained because cartoons have the characteristic of being dynamic, and they also require children's thinking to move as fast as possible and to process information quickly. This helps the children when they have to solve math exercises or when they are tested counter-clockwise.

When watching cartoons, children tend to find themselves in one of the characters they watch carefully. In this way, they can also say that they also participate affectionately at the animated drawing they pursue. It seems that this helps to trace the boundaries between what actually exists and what is actually fiction, while helping them to develop their intuitive thinking. In addition to those listed above, depending on their favourite cartoons, we can use cartoons to cultivate general knowledge luggage in a light, accessible and fun way.

## **6. Findings**

If we're talking about the benefits of cartoons and animation alike, we could also consider the health benefits besides those mentioned earlier. American journalist Suskind, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1995, published in 2014 " *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*". It is an autobiographical book in which the author relates and explains how Disney movies helped his autistic child develop communication skills and gradually interact with the outside world and family members (Suskind, 2016). Two years after the publication of this work, director Roger Ross Williams made it possible to produce a documentary film about the life of Autistic child Owen Suskind and the role Disney had in developing and recovering in his struggle with autism.

### **6.1. Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism - a new portal towards the inside world of children with deficiencies**

Owen was 3 years old when he suddenly stopped talking, being diagnosed with regressive autism. Although in shock, little Owens's parents contacted several paediatrician specialists who once again confirmed their diagnosis and said they were children diagnosed with this type of autism that never regained their ability to communicate. Even before this affection, Owen enjoyed the Disney movies he often

followed with his older brother, Walter. Owens's father, journalist Ron Suskind, noticed that this activity created a certain state of tranquillity after diagnosing with autism, being practically an open door to the child's mind. The characters in the animated films were his friends and companions. Joy turned into euphoria the day the boy came out of isolation and said, "Juicervose, Juicervose." Parents believed they were asking for "a juice," but what the baby says was "it's just your voice". These were the first words spoken in a year by Owen and were part of a song from *The Little Mermaid*. This event has completely changed Owens's life.

A few weeks later, his father bought a doll that embodied Iago, the parrot in the movie "Aladdin," and through dialogue he managed to have his first conversation with his son after years of silence. Ron realized that his son knew the Disney film dialogues by heart! Through movies like "The Little Mermaid" or "The Lion King," Owen finds a way to understand and connect with the world around him. Owen has not been talking for years, but he has memorized all the dialogues of Disney cartoon movies, adapted them to his own life and thus communicated with the outside world, family, therapists and psychologists. "I felt it was a wonderful, fantastic and wonderful world", says Owen. The most well-known scenes in Disney movies blend in with Owens's real world and one can see how he uses empathy with characters like Simba or Ariel to interpret and recognize reality. "Personifying" the protagonists of the films, Ron discovered the way to communicate with his son. This breakthrough has changed the life of the whole family and can be an example for many others who have a family member diagnosed with autism.

Love channelled through empathy, dedication, patience, perseverance, teamwork, encouragement, dedication, and excitement to each achievement of Owen make this story of real life an inspiration and an example to follow for each parent in a similar situation. "I came out of isolation because of Hercules, who encouraged me to fight, to admit good and true friends like the characters in the *Jungle Book* and to have fun with" *Dumbo*. "They are part of the life I've memorized until today," says Owen, who with the help of these animations had the opportunity to discover his own feelings, emotions and also to understand and overcome his anxieties.

From the age of nine, the boy "returned" to communicate with his family as any other child of his age, although it should be noted that he also had to face bullying and ill-treatment of school colleagues and other people who did not accept "those who are different," ignoring the benefits of inclusion and diversity. Since then, Owen has gone to college and today has two jobs. He attended Comedy Central, a comedy program alongside actor Gilbert Gottfried, who embodied the original voice of the parrot Iago in *Aladdin's* animated film. At the end of the documentary, we see Owen, to the point of having his own completely independent life, moving to an apartment beside his girlfriend's apartment, also diagnosed with autism. This documentary not only tells Owens's life and how it becomes as functional as possible with Disney heroes and his family. It is a story to overcome the borders of autism and the importance of the environment and family support for people suffering from autism to have an independent and happy life. Ron Suskind's goal, as well as documentary director Roger Ross Williams, is that this film offers "hope to parents and inspires everyone to realize the potential of people living with autism.

## **6.2. Inside out - a guide through the labyrinth of emotions**

More recently, in 2015, Pixar is launching the *Inside Out* film dealing with a current issue, such as neuroscience, the term that defines a set of brain sciences (neurobiology, psychophysiology, psychobiology,

neuroethology, neuropsychology, neurophilosophy) , and the relationship of emotions in the configuration of our brain. Again, the animated film shows that it can be a good tool to raise deep, science-based problems that serve to educate children both in the classroom and at home, and that highlights the importance of emotions in the configuration of our personality. If we were to talk about some of the educational benefits and the development of emotional intelligence as well as cognitive capacities, we could list at least four or five aspects that give truth to this information. One of the many successes of the film is that the viewer is presented with the fundamental role of emotions in people's day. Basic emotions are just the five that appear in the film: joy, sadness, disgust, fear and anger. Facing an overwhelming experience of feeling or experiencing only joyful experiences, the film makes us aware that we also need other emotions to develop.

Emotions are presented in an appropriate and understandable way by adults and children. The relationship between sadness and joy is very interesting, and the relationship between the two characters throughout the film shows us that there can be no one else and that we need sadness, nostalgia to overcome some hops that help us gradually mature. Since the beginning of our life, the prevailing emotion is joy and we do not forget it a few times. Education in joy requires an attempt to connect with that part of the child in us and sometimes rusty because of the many responsibilities and daily challenges. Joy builds ties that make us grow and mature, and a sense of joy that does not deviate from engagement, releasing an optimistic thread must not be missed in the family or in the classroom. The term "essential memory" is presented and explained in the film. There are memories that we use to associate with strong emotions, but they are not stored and read as they did, but we analyze them from the perspective of what we are today.

Therefore, this is a great advance of neuroscience, because it is very important to know who we are and to know how to identify the emotions through which we analyze our past. However, we cannot keep all the memories we have accumulated over the years. We cannot go any further without forgetting "imaginary friends". To mature is to forget, but to preserve who we were and, above all, because they are related to what we want to become.

Finally, one of the most important lessons that this film has left us as a lesson is the awareness that we are more than a mere emotional state, and when we are asked, "How are we?" , the "Good" or "Not good" answer is very short, because "good" means "happy, delighted, hopeful, optimistic, joyful etc." and the "Not good" answer can mean from "sad" to "angry or disappointed", passing through a wide range of states that our children (and also ourselves) are often unable to identify. In this sense, we are often emotionally illiterate, and the development of self-consciousness can help us break the unhealthy patterns and learn new ways to use our emotions as guidance in emotional development. The opportunities presented by this film allow us to reach a better understanding of the world that is beyond the obvious, and to deepen our self-esteem and empathy towards our child.

## **7. Conclusion**

To begin with, we have to say that the various investigations show that there are both negative aspects and positive aspects, and these differ in many respects depending on the person and the content of the animated bands. In 2011 a study conducted by the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences of University of California shows that the intervention shows potential promise in improving the socioemotional functioning in children with ASD through the utilization of peers, video and behavioural

modelling, and a community-based theatrical setting. (Corbett et al., 2011). In the case of children, it is recommended that when viewing cartoons, content and duration are controlled by an adult, preferably a parent or a person in constant care. Therefore, when talking about the effects of cartoons, it must be taken into account that they affect differently those who can have a subjective assessment and should not be neglected to judge that they are harmless. A classic study conducted by Gilbert in 2002 about the impact of media on children aged 5 and 6 years exposed for two hours per day of various programs has shown that, at this age, children are not able to make full the difference between reality and fiction. I mean, they tend to identify cartoon characters as members of their own family. This could lead to very dangerous imitation attitudes, as warned by the Gestalt psychotherapist Clotilde Sarrió. Identification with the protagonists of the drawings implies an imitation that can make the children not only dress like them, but also act under the motto "what can my superhero do I can do too." We must not forget the influence they can exert on moral principles, adds Sarrió. "Apparently harmless cartoons could contain messages that influence concepts and stereotypes about sexuality, violence or xenophobia, not to mention just three examples"(Sarrio, 2013).

Iandolo, Esposito and Venuti, (2013) in turn, considers that the central issue is not "how long" the exposure is recommended, but what "children" are exposed to. It is important that the characters have "rather positive rather than negative" behaviours, "aggressiveness to be expressed but not beneficial", and efforts and solutions to be emphasized through adaptation and determination. The "difference between fun, poor education and delinquent behaviour" has to be done and, in this context, "parental control is fundamental. It is generally advisable to know, as parents, which cartoons our children prefer so that we can comment with them certain scenes that could create a lot of confusion in their minds. We cannot always be there, but we can take advantage of certain moments, watching together episodes and making them aware of subliminal messages that may be in contradiction with reality. As Barth and Ciobanu, (2017), the learning process, selection and observation, children show interest for those contents which motivates them, which are comical, which contain fantasy, adventure, action and in which some of the characters or situations overlap situations in their real world or their imaginary world. We should ask ourselves, as parents, and as well as teachers what makes the kids watch cartoons with negative / aggressive content? Do they identify themselves with the good or the evil of that animated series? Perhaps many of us have not posed the problem that cartoons for children may be harmful to their long-term behaviour. And, moreover, if they did not have cartoons, how would our children spend that spare time?

We all enjoy the moments when our children are quieter than ever with their favourite animated heroes. We need these moments, as parents, they are part of real life, but let's not forget that the number of hours our children spend in front of the TV irreversibly influence their behaviour, that is why very important in this matter is the extent to which we offer to children this type of escape from the daily, both quantitative, closely related to the number of hours spent in front of the small screen and the qualitative, in accordance with the emotional needs and the cognitive development of the small viewers.

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