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Transforming curricula in a rapidly changing world: Red beads within African landscapes: *Little Red Riding Hood* recontextualised within Foundation Phase education

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Abstract

This article examines how Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase preservice teachers at a university of technology in the Western Cape adapt the canonical European fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* through cultural localisation and multilingual storytelling. The study is grounded in the decolonial philosophy of *Sankofa* and adaptation theory and explores how narrative retrieval and transformation function within teacher education and curriculum design. A qualitative content analysis of 30 student-generated retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* was conducted to identify patterns of symbolic reinterpretation, contextual relocation, and moral reframing. The findings show that participants reposition characters, settings, and language practices to reflect local identities, community ethics, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Finally, this study contributes empirical evidence to curriculum studies by demonstrating how adaptation can serve as a strategy for epistemic repositioning in Foundation Phase teacher education; the study shows how preservice teachers move beyond passive consumption of canonical European texts to active reinterpretation of the story, grounded in local knowledge systems. Adaptation thus becomes a structured pedagogical practice through which students retrieve Indigenous symbols, languages, kinship structures, and moral frameworks, and embed them within inherited narrative forms. The authority of the original text is thus decentred, and meaning-making is relocated within African social and linguistic contexts. This process illustrates how curriculum content can be reworked from within—not by erasing established texts, but by reframing them through contextually situated epistemologies that align with the lived realities of Foundation Phase classrooms.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, IKS, Sankofa, fairytales, Foundation Phase

Introduction

Fairy tales have long been considered cultural mirrors that reflect the morals and worldviews held by the societies from which they emerge (Zipes, 2006). In the South African classroom context, the fairy tales most familiar to Foundation Phase learners remain entrenched in European traditions, and although learners may have encountered these stories before, they

depict worlds that lie outside their lived experience (Machet & Olen, 1997). In postcolonial educational contexts such as South Africa, canonical European fairy tales raise fundamental questions about relevance, representation, and power (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Their inclusion in curricula, often without critical framing, risks perpetuating cultural erasure and epistemic injustice (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Mbembe, 2016). Yet their recognisable structure and symbolic density also offer fertile ground for reappropriation (Zipes, 1993). This article examines how preservice teachers in the Foundation Phase programme at a university of technology reclaimed *Little Red Riding Hood* through culturally relevant rewritings shaped by autobiographical storytelling. Existing research shows that fairy tales can serve as valuable tools in teacher education, particularly for exploring issues of gender, power, and identity (Greenhill & Rudy, 2010; Davies, 2003; Vasquez, 2004). In addition, scholarship has documented how *Little Red Riding Hood* has been widely adapted across cultures and reshaped over time in response to changing historical and ideological contexts (Beckett, 2008; Zipes, 1998). These rewritings become acts of narrative decolonisation embedded in linguistic diversity, socio-cultural specificity, and lived experience (Smith, 2012). This study examines how Africanised fairy tales can function as teaching tools in the Foundation Phase to support contextualised storytelling and cultural affirmation; it draws on adaptation theory to examine how preservice teachers can adapt familiar narratives to align with African settings and values. As Le Grange (2016) asserted, to decolonise a curriculum, one has to rethink the subject.

Problem statement

There is limited research on how South African Foundation Phase preservice teachers adapt canonical European fairy tales within formal teacher education programmes. Further, while *Sankofa* has been theorised as a decolonial and Afrocentric pedagogical framework (Slater, 2019), there is little classroom-based research that connects it explicitly to narrative adaptation as a curriculum practice. This study addresses these gaps by analysing 30 preservice teacher retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*. It examines how cultural localisation, multilingual storytelling, and symbolic reinterpretation operate within a teacher education context shaped by decolonial aims. It also poses the following research question, which guided the study: "How do Foundation Phase preservice teachers adapt *Little Red Riding Hood* through cultural localisation and multilingual narrative practices, and what pedagogical implications do these adaptations hold for curriculum transformation?"

Paradigmatic grounding: Sankofa

Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi (Go back and fetch it, Akan proverb)

George (2017) explained that an Afrocentric pedagogy functions as a culturally grounded educational model, which affirms African identity and challenges Eurocentric schooling. This study adopts Sankofa as its paradigmatic and methodological lens for analysing Foundation Phase participants' adaptations of *Little Red Riding Hood*. The term Sankofa originates from Akan philosophy, and means "go back and fetch it," symbolising the retrieval of valuable knowledge from the past to inform the present and future (Slater, 2019; Stanley & Chukwuorji,

2024). Recent African educational discourse positions Sankofa as a means of seeing Africa through African lenses, and of building forward through contextually grounded knowledge production (Pence et al., 2023). Opoku (1997) asserted that Sankofa teaches it is not wrong to return to what has been forgotten because wisdom lies in learning from the past, encouraging the recovery of humanism and values from earlier times. As Stanley & Chukwuorji (2024, p. 186) explained, Sankofa "encourages the return to one's roots to reclaim and revalue those aspects of our heritage that are life-affirming and empowering." Similarly, Dei (2012, p. 105) defined Sankofa as a framework for "revisiting indigenous knowledge systems in order to construct decolonised, contextually relevant pedagogies."

A framework is needed to show how returning to inherited knowledge can become a creative practice of reshaping stories, a process illuminated by the theory of adaptation. Hutcheon (2013) stated that adaptation can be understood as the transposition of an identifiable text, involving the interpretive acts of appropriation and intertextual engagement with the text being adapted, in this case is *Little Red Riding Hood*. She conceptualised adaptation as both a process and a product—a creative act of reinterpretation that transforms prior texts across media, contexts, and audiences. Adaptation should be seen as "repetition with variation but without replication" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 7), allowing the adapted narratives to be situated in new socio-political realities. This has been done successfully, as shown in a study by Beckett (2002), who examined contemporary retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*, in which preservice teachers retold the story to subvert traditional tropes. When considered together with the philosophy of Sankofa, both discourses place importance on retrieval and its transformative potential, although they highlight different elements of the process. Sankofa advocates a journey back through ancestral knowledge towards a retrieval that can reconceptualise the present, and adaptation is a theoretical idea that focuses on "the transformative recoding of previous narratives towards new meanings" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 18).

In this study, Sankofa functions as a guiding framework, framing narrative retrieval as a pedagogical act; returning to Indigenous symbols, languages, kinship structures, and communal ethics is not nostalgia, but a way to grounding curriculum practice in local knowledge systems. Adaptation theory, by contrast, explains how these acts of narrative retrieval are expressed and made visible in stories. It accounts for the ways in which a canonical European tale is transposed, recontextualised, and reshaped across cultural and ideological settings. Read together, these frameworks enabled a dual analytic focus. Sankofa directed attention to moments where participants retrieved culturally resonant elements, including indigenous naming practices, ancestral references, local foods, kinship terms, and community-based moral codes. Adaptation theory guided the analysis of structural and symbolic transformation, including character reconfiguration, setting relocation, shifts in narrative voice, and moral reframing. These lenses informed the coding categories used in the content analysis, specifically in relation to symbolic reinterpretations, cultural localisations, and moral rearticulations. Thus, Sankofa and adaptation were not treated as abstract theoretical references but as operational tools that structured the interpretation of the preservice teachers' retellings.

The relevance of adaptations for preservice teaching in the Foundation Phase

Propp (1968) described the genre of fairy tales as narrative that is structured around functional units that communicate transformation through conflict and resolution. Lüthi (1976) added that these stories are one-dimensional, where the natural and supernatural coexist seamlessly, characters lack depth and are not psychologically complex, and objects are symbolically charged. Zipes (2012, p. 53) took a kinder approach, arguing that fairy tales are narratives that can exist in oral and literary forms and reflect the hopes, fears, and moral codes of the communities in which they are produced, noting that they are "tools of cultural transmission and imagination." VisikoKnox-Johnson (2016) also observed that fairy tales can be used positively in the literature classroom.

In modern literary theory, fairy tales are also seen as cultural texts that develop through adaption and reflect the ideology, concerns, and aspirations of each version (Hutcheon 2013; Warner 1994). Research has shown that participants revealed discomfort when confronting familiar cultural narratives and often resist rewriting tasks (Xu, 2021, Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). This may be because they are not confident, are uncertain how to address bias, violence, and moral ambiguities, and so avoid such discussions (De Haene et al., 2010). But this hesitancy needs to be overcome. When used in adult education, fairy tales can scaffold affective discussions about identity, conflict, and moral choice (Kole, 2018). Greenhill and Rudy (2010) highlighted fairy tales' pedagogical potential in teacher education, where critical reinterpretation strengthens analytical thinking. Vasquez (2004) used fairy tale rewriting to model critical literacy, and Davies (2003) demonstrated how deconstructing gendered subjectivities helps future teachers understand identity formation. Cekiso (2015) affirmed that teachers have a responsibility to challenge learners to think critically about gender representation and gender-based violence in fairy tales. Teaching preservice teachers to "read against the grain" (Noviant, 2021, p. 88) builds awareness of these patterns, recognition of textual bias, and helps them to challenge stereotypes. Kole (2018) insisted that they be used as deconstructive tools to reveal the operation of power.

However, there are many caveats about the use of fairy tales in the curriculum. Far from innocent, these narratives encode social hierarchies, moral instruction, and gender expectations reflective of their cultural origins (Zipes, 1998). Winston (2007) noted that fairy tales' moral and dramatic appeal can enrich learning but may fail pedagogically if not contextualised. Lewin (2020) cautioned that the simplified moral logic of many tales can distort ethical understanding, replacing moral nuance with fear-based lessons. Saxby (2022) argued that traditional approaches to teaching fairy tales could be problematic because they often perpetuate outdated gender and cultural stereotypes, a concern similarly highlighted by Mitchell (2010), Lester (2007), and Zhou et al. (2022). Heteronormative ideologies are embedded in these tales, with female characters linked to care, loyalty, and beauty, and male characters to agency and authority.

The global and pedagogical significance of *Little Red Riding Hood*

Little Red Riding Hood, in particular, has become a dominant Western text, constructing binaries such as innocence versus danger, female disobedience versus patriarchal discipline, and civilisation versus wilderness (Beckett, 2008). Zipes (1998) argued that the tale endures because it continually restages unresolved tensions around gender, sexuality, and social discipline. The tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* is classified as The Glutton (Type 333) in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Indes categorisation system (Uther, 2004). At a surface level, the central motif of this story is a young girl who is sent to deliver food to her grandmother and is then deceived by a predatory figure that disguises itself and attacks the girl, the grandmother, or both. The earliest forms of *Red Riding Hood* stories can be traced back to European folktales, especially from France and Italy. Perrault's version (1697, cited in Zipes, 1993) entitled *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, might be considered the first written version of the fairy tale, where the theme was moralistic and warning young girls about the dangers of trusting strangers. However, in contrast to the version later, the tale was quite tragic and reinforced patriarchal concerns about the freedom and security of women. When the Grimm brothers (Zipes, 1993) rewrote Perrault's version, they transformed it into a parable of repentance and virtue that introduced the notion of the patriarchal myth concerning redemption (Tatar, 2003). Finally, Barnett (2021) noted that Perrault's and the Grimms' versions codify obedience and chastity as moral imperatives.

The tale has also been transformed through modern retellings like *Rapunzel's Revenge* (Hale & Hale, 2008), *Ruby* (Emberley, 1990) and *Little Red Cowboy Hat* (Lowell, 1997), which challenge the male gaze by presenting Red as self-aware and agentic (Beckett, 2008). For Zipes (1998), these reinventions expose both the persistence of patriarchal fantasies and the potential of fairy tales to critique them. Vaz da Silva's (2010) review of Beckett's (2008) *Red Riding Hood for All Ages* commended the cross-cultural analysis of the tale in 12 languages, noting its evolution from moralistic cautionary story to feminist reinterpretation. Beckett (2008, p. 15) traced how Red gradually transforms from victim to agent, sometimes even embodying "wolf-like" independence. Carter's (1979) *The Company of Wolves*, for example, redefined the traditional fairy tale from the perspective of feminism (Peng & Chen, 2024) and presented Red as an assertive heroine who takes control of her own fate rather than being a victim (Warner, 1994). Pulliam's (2024) research has shown the multicultural retellings of this tale reposition identity and belonging (i.e. *Petite Rouge* situates the story in Cajun Louisiana), challenge gender roles (*Red Hat and the Wolf*) and foreground empathy and community (*Little Red Riding Hood: An Islamic Tale*), which can move learners beyond the moral of obedience toward discussions of diversity, inclusion, and global citizenship. Within the African tradition, van der Walt (2012) compared the Venda folktale *Die Hebsugtige Seekoei* (*The Greedy Hippo*) with *Little Red Riding Hood*, showing how both use grotesque imagery to instil moral awareness. Set in Ghana, *Pretty Salma: A Red Riding Hood Story from Africa* (Daly, 2006) used the call-and-response dialogue rooted in West African oral tradition and the story foregrounds community settings and centres cultural identity. In African literature, the

adaptation of *Little Red Riding Hood* encompasses elements of postcolonialism where Red faces challenges that are representative of contemporary society's problems such as corruption, wars, and destruction of the environment (Kelly, 2022).

This theoretical grounding establishes the conceptual tools that guide the study's design, shaping how the participants' retellings are interpreted in the methodological section that follows.

Research design and data collection

This study was designed as an empirical classroom-based qualitative inquiry, situated within a third year Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase English module at a university of technology in the Western Cape of South Africa. The module engages preservice teachers in critical literacy and requires students to complete a narrative adaptation assignment as part of English curriculum studies and as part of a structured coursework task. Students were required to rewrite the canonical fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* in ways that localised the narrative within the South African cultural, linguistic, and social contexts. The dataset presented in this article consists of 30 student-generated narratives produced in response to the assignment and it is important to note that these texts were not published articles, but original creative adaptations written by the preservice teachers enrolled in the module.

We used Schreier's (2012) model to analyse the stories generated by the students in a systematic yet flexible manner, allowing categories to emerge inductively from the data. All 30 student narratives were transferred into a coding matrix and organised thematically because the focus was on cross-cutting patterns rather than individual case trajectories. Thus, pseudonym markers were not retained in the final analytic table, and excerpts are therefore presented anonymously, with all quotations drawn from and systematically coded across the complete dataset. The manner in which this was done is as follows: (1) all 30 narratives were read in full; (2) we then created initial open codes that focused on character transformation, setting, and language use; (3) codes were then grouped in broader categories and finally; (4) three dominant themes were identified. We also drew on Elo and Kyngäs's (2008) process, which combined open coding, categorisation, and abstraction to trace how participants reworked *Little Red Riding Hood* into local forms. The codes were then refined through iterative reading and comparison to ensure consistency, following Mayring's (2014) guidance for interpretive validity. Although we used open coding principles, we were interested in how participants located their stories culturally, what symbolic and thematic transformations occurred, and if and how multilingual language use functioned in these stories. Our focus was on understanding how the preservice teachers adapted a European fairy tale to express contextually grounded perspectives, rather than on quantifying textual features.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the faculty research ethics committee, and an ethical clearance number was issued (EFEC 05-05.2025). The students were informed that their coursework would be used for research purposes and were provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the study. Participation in the research component was voluntary and did not affect academic grading. Written informed consent was obtained from all

participants, and all identifying details were removed from the stories and this article to protect their anonymity. Given that the author served both as lecturer of the module and researcher in this study, it is important to acknowledge this dual role as part of the interpretive framework of the research. All coding and analysis were conducted after grading had been completed to minimise any power-related influence, and reflexive notes were maintained during analysis to remain attentive to potential bias and to ensure that interpretations were grounded in the textual data rather than pedagogical expectations.

Findings and discussion

The following section presents three themes emerging from the qualitative content analysis of the 30 preservice teacher retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*. The findings show how the participants reinterpreted the symbolic, cultural, and moral elements of the take when rewriting it in African contexts. Their retellings demonstrate sustained engagement with the story's core motifs while reshaping them through locally grounded identities, landscapes, and values. Three themes stood out in the retellings: the first is the symbolic transformation of key characters and objects, the second is the localisation of setting and familial practices, and the third is the reframing of the tale's moral centre. This discussion does not treat the adaptations as isolated creative exercises but rather, the discussion examines how these narrative shifts reflect broader pedagogical and epistemic repositioning within Foundation Phase teacher education. Each theme is presented below with illustrative excerpts, followed by an analytical interpretation grounded within the study's Sankofa theoretical framework (Slater, 2019).

Theme 1: Symbolic reinterpretation

The first theme identified is symbolic reinterpretation. This theme examines how participants reworked the central symbolic markers of the canonical tale in order to reposition identity and power within locally grounded frames. Rather than reproducing the red hood and wolf as fixed archetypes, preservice teachers transformed these figures into culturally resonant artefacts and socially recognisable agents. The theme focuses on how objects, clothing, bodily markers, and antagonistic figures were recoded to reflect Indigenous aesthetics, contemporary social realities, and shifting gender dynamics. Through these transformations, adaptation operates as a mechanism for re-signifying inherited symbols within new epistemic contexts.

The first symbol identified in our analysis was that of the red hood. The red cap worn by *Rotkäppchen* (Zipes, 2014) functions as both a literal object and a potent symbol of identity, morality, and transformation. Her name does not originate from birth but from clothing.

> Once there was a dear little girl who was loved by everyone, but most of all by her grandmother, who could not imagine what to give the child next. One day she gave her a little red velvet cap, and because it suited her so well and she wanted to wear nothing else, she was always called Little Red Cap. (Zipes, 2014, p. 85)

The Biedermeier period (1815–1848) was marked by a strong emphasis on domesticity, modesty, and moral order, where the home was celebrated as a haven of security and where

children were to be obedient, polite, and industrious. The cosy interiors and rural domestic settings of stories like *Little Red Riding Hood* mirror the Biedermeier ideal of the home as a moral centre, in contrast to the dangers of the outside world (Blackbourn, 1998; Nicholas, 2002). Within the context of Biedermeier Germany, red was a colour of moral ambivalence because it signified both life and disobedience, virtue and temptation. Both Zipes (2012) and Tatar (2003) noted that the red hood's brightness renders the child visible and vulnerable within the forest because it draws the wolf's gaze and, by extension, society's moral scrutiny.

The representation of red in the African retellings is cultural rather than moral. In the African versions, as in the original German version, Red's name is given due to the visibility of the colour red but is imbued with cultural references. Little Red Beads was given her name because "the little girl's grandmother gave her red beads made out of coloured eggshells when her small group moved away," and Little Red Thandi was "the girl who always had red on." Little Red Hat wore a red leather Fulani hat "which suited her so well, that she would never wear anything else." Red caps also transformed into doeks "when Naledi leaves her home she always wears her favourite doek," and "her father gave her this special red doek, dyed with red ochre, as a gift, before he died. Naledi wears it out of love and respect for her father."

Sometimes the red cap completely transmogrified into other items of clothing. In one case, it became a buckskin "Her grandmother loved her dearly and gave her a buckskin with hand painted patterns for her 10th birthday" and in another, it became a the more modern hoodie "Her Gogo had the only sewing machine in the whole township, and with it, she made her granddaughter a cherry red hoodie."

Some participants chose to remove the idea of a cap altogether. Those who did often changed it to something culturally resonant. One participant wrote: "They called her Little Red Riding Hood not because she wore a European hood, but because she always carried a bright red umbrella under the hot African sun." This ingenious twist retained the nickname *Little Red* but gave it a practical basis in the local setting, using the umbrella is protection from sun (and later from rain) and, in a climactic moment, the umbrella even becomes a tool as Red uses its pointy end to jab a hyena.

It is also interesting to note that in some of the African stories, hair replaces the red cap. Some participants in this study pointed to Red's hair as a marker of identity, rather than the hood:

> In a small township, just outside of Port Elizabeth, lived a beautiful Xhosa girl, with big brown eyes and dreadlocks that grew down to her back.
>
> Once upon a time there was a little girl with reddish brown hair and her mom lovingly referred to her as Little Red Mane because her thick curly hair looked like that of a lion's unkempt mane.

Sometimes, Red does not have a red cap but rather, hair accoutrements take the place of the hood:

> Bomvulani was known for her ribbons in her hair; it was a gift from her umakhulu who lived far away on a farm.
>
> One morning, Cebisa's grandmother was sitting on a big yellow bucket busy braiding her granddaughter's long hair. She braided orange, red, and green beads at the bottom of her locks.

While most kept the character of Red as a female, a few toyed with gender roles. One participant wrote a version titled *Little Red Hoodie* featuring a boy in a red sweatshirt who has to deliver medicine to his sick gogo. This flip challenges the assumption that the main character must be a girl or that only girls are preyed upon. In the boy's version, the threats and the moral shifted as he faced a gang leader as the wolf, and the lesson was about courage and asking for help when in danger. Transpositions such as this invite discussions on whether the core message changes when the protagonist is male. In this case, it did because the participant's story became more about community intervention (the boy whistles for help and neighbours come) than personal violation. Another participant kept Red as a girl but interestingly, described her as a tomboy who "wore red izihlangu [Converse sneakers] more often than a hood." These identity tweaks show participants using characters to break stereotypes. Red does not have to be a dainty, hood-wearing girl but rather, she can be a sneaker-wearing, soccer-playing girl who still confronts a wolf.

The second symbolic transformation highlighted in the retellings is that of the wolf. In *Rotkäppchen* (Zipes, 2014), the wolf is described not through physical detail but through his behaviour, speech, and cunning and has long been noted as a symbolic stand-in for the predatory male a figure of seduction and danger used to warn young women against sexual vulnerability and disobedience (Tatar, 2003; Warner, 1994; Zipes, 1983). The Grimms gave no visual description and there is no mention of his size, colour, or appearance. Instead, he is anthropomorphised, and his menace lies in deception rather than monstrosity.

> As Little Red Cap was going through the woods, she met a wolf. But Little Red Cap did not know what a wicked creature he was and was not afraid of him. (Zipes, 2014, p. 85)

Participant adaptations lent into the anthropomorphism and the wolf characters were often given human names like "Mr Wolfaard and asked her where she was going" and "I am Mr Wolfgang, nice to meet you dear." One participant had the wolf embodied as a criminal character named Bra Sipho who used the lingua franca of the streets by addressing Red in *Tsotsitaal*, which is a local urban slang mix of languages (Mesthrie & Hurst, 2013; Slabbert & Myers-Scotton, 1996) when talking to his accomplices. Scholars have noted that contemporary retellings often humanise the wolf as a man with exploitative intent, exposing the gendered power dynamics and sexual politics embedded in the original tale (Bacchilega, 1997; Haase, 2004). In our retellings, the encounters with the wolf often echoed the fear faced by young girls in South Africa every day. The inherent menace of the male is seen in how the character of the wolf speaks to the young girl:

> While she was resting in the shade, she heard a hoarse voice behind her. "And what do we have here?"
>
> On her way to her grandma's hut, she ran into the Big Bad Gangster who asked, "Where are you going, little girl?'
>
> I'm between shacks that I don't recognise, and I saw that the sun wasn't so bright anymore. Suddenly someone jumped between two shacks and grabbed my arm. "Hello, Little Red Thandi," the voice whispered.

The fact that the wolf is seen as an adult to be trusted is illustrated here when the participant writes:

> "Poor little girl. Come with me. I'll drive you to your granny's." Cebisa thankfully jumped into the black car. Next to her sat another big person. This man had deep dark eyes, which stared at her.

In several retellings, the wolf is refigured as a gangster, predatory driver, or manipulative adult male, reflecting contemporary South African anxieties around gendered violence and urban crime. This transformation aligns with Bacchilega's (1997) argument that postmodern fairy-tale revisions expose and rework the gendered power structures embedded in canonical narratives, particularly the construction of the wolf as a figure of masculine authority and sexual threat. Similarly, Haase (2004) noted that modern adaptations frequently humanise the wolf in order to foreground the social realities that underpin the tale's symbolic violence. In the preservice teachers' narratives, the wolf's shift from folkloric predator to socially recognisable male aggressor renders implicit patriarchal danger explicitly, and is therefore contextually grounded. The abstract menace of the wolf inherent in the Grimm's tale is not reproduced but rather, these adaptations situate the very real threat within identifiable social environments, thereby transforming the wolf into a critique of lived gendered vulnerability.

These symbolic reinterpretations demonstrate how preservice teachers actively re-signify the central markers of the canonical tale to reflect local identities and social realities. The transformation of the red hood into beads, doeks, hoodies, hair, or culturally embedded artefacts, and the refiguring of the wolf as a socially recognisable figure situated within contemporary South African contexts, shift the narrative's symbolic economy from abstract moral allegory to lived experience. In doing so, participants enact what Sankofa theorists describe as the retrieval and revalorisation of Indigenous knowledge systems within present pedagogical practice (Dei, 2012; Slater, 2019; Stanley & Chukwuorji, 2024). These adaptations also align with adaptation theory's understanding of narrative transposition as "repetition with variation" across cultural contexts (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 110), while exposing and reworking the gendered power structures embedded in the canonical tale (Bacchilega, 1997). Symbolic reinterpretation therefore, operates as a deliberate pedagogical and epistemic act, illustrating how adaptation enables Foundation Phase preservice teachers to reposition canonical symbols within culturally responsive and contextually grounded frameworks rather than reproducing them uncritically.

Theme 2: Cultural localisation

The second theme identified was that of cultural localisation, and this addresses the relocation of the narrative from its European folkloric landscape to specific South African geographies and sociocultural environments. This theme analyses how setting, food, familial roles, and community structures were reconfigured to align with local lived realities. Localisation here functions as more than contextual decoration as it reshapes narrative logic by grounding the tale in culturally specific relationships, economies, and spatial meanings.

The original story *Rotkäppchen* (Zipes, 2014) is set in 19th-century rural Germany, specifically in a *Wald*, a dense forest central to German folklore. According to Zipes (2012) in German folklore, the Wald, specifically within the Hesse and Kassel regions, functions as both a physical and symbolic landscape. It is a liminal space between civilisation and wilderness, safety and danger, childhood and adulthood. The setting is geographically vague, but it mirrors the German domestic ideal of Biedermeier, and is rooted in the peasant oral tradition of Hess (Blackbourn, 1998; Nicholas, 2002). In several of the participants' stories, the Wald of the Grimm tale is replaced by African landscapes, both rural and urban, where the locale brings a host of contextual details. Contextual details the participants included in their retellings included the name of towns (Canzibe in Transkei) and an acknowledgment of the major culture of the area, "She lived in Shangana village in Mpumalanga" and "Once upon a time, there lived a little San girl in a small San community in the Kalahari desert."

Many retellings are set next to a river, situating the story in a cultural and geographical manner:

> Once upon a time, in a small village on the edge of the Limpopo River, there lived a girl named Refilwe, whom everyone called Little Red.
>
> Nonhle Obomvu's gogo lived far away from her, in a place that is called Ububi Obumnyama—the place of black evil.

The participants also embedded their stories within the seasons. In one story, Red is walking to her grandmother's during the rainy season, and the participant describes how Red has to cross a swollen river there. Some of the South African stories shift the Wald to an urban setting, highlighting the hustle and bustle of interconnected communities. It is no longer just Red and her mother but rather, Red walking through bustling streets, calling out to neighbours while she navigates streets with passing cars. This can be seen in one story where Red is walking through a "bustling township outside Cape Town, where brightly painted shacks stood in rows."

As with the tales set in rural settings, many of the stories name the township in which Red lives. Sometimes the township is named specifically ("I walked through Thembisa") and sometimes not ("Once upon a time there lived a girl in a little township house"). Often, the fact that the character lives in a township is also linked to the typed of housing that is common in townships:

> Once upon a time in the small Mbuku-township lived a little girl named Cebisa. She was a lovely girl who loved to sing and dance. She was a real wonderer and dreamer. She lived with her grandmother in a small house with corrugated iron sheets.

The second cultural localisation we see in the retellings is that our girl also collects flowers as she makes her way to her grandmother's home. In the original tale *Rotkäppchen* (Zipes, 2014), Red collects flowers on her way to visit her grandmother.

> Little Red Cap ran after the flowers, and whenever she picked one she saw a still more beautiful one farther on, and so she went deeper and deeper into the woods. (Zipes, 2014, p. 86)

One participant described her picking wild proteas (South Africa's national flower) and others noticed the beautiful aloes or Baobab trees along the way:

> Naledi began her journey to her grandmother, but as she crossed the bridge she noticed a beautiful aloe plant underneath the bridge

> The Fulani huts stand under three great Baobab trees.

The third example of cultural localisation lies in the gift that Red takes to her grandmother. In *Rotkäppchen* (Zipes, 2014), the girl is sent by her mother to take cake and wine to her grandmother.

> One day her mother said to her, 'Come, Little Red Cap, here is a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. Take them to your grandmother. She is ill and weak, and they will do her good. (Zipes, 2014, p. 85)

In the Biedermeier ideal, the *kuchen* (cake) and *wein* (wine) symbolise nurturing, care, and domestic duty, consistent with the moral and cultural values of early 19th-century German life. Food, particularly baked goods, symbolise feminine virtues and carry the dual symbolic weight of being both medicinal and moral (Blackbourn, 1998; Nicholas, 2002). The delivery of food is also influenced by the Grimms' moral framing because such gestures reinforce the virtues of obedience, filial love, and compassion for the elderly. Thus, the gift to the grandmother is not just a practical errand but a moral lesson in caring for one's kin and fulfilling familial obligations within a structured, moral household. In the South African stories, the grandmother or gogo is also ill, and the basket's contents were far more local, with homemade vetkoek (fried fat cakes), *amanzi* (water) and samp, a jar of marula (African berry) jelly, maize porridge, or even a bottle of *mageu* (traditional fermented drink). For example, one participant wrote: "Little Red carefully packed the bowl of *umngqusho* [samp and beans] next to the rooibos tea in her basket, Gogo's favourites." This not only localises the sensory details of the story, but also transforms the errand from a generic chore into an act of familial care. Sometimes the medicine that Red brings is pharmaceutical, and at others, tends towards African remedies:

> Cherry, go to Gogo and take her some stew and *viks* [eucalyptus menthol rub]; it is cold and she has a terrible cough, I think her TB might be acting up again.

> Her gogo, Gog' Phakade was very old and ill, so her Mama was forced to send her with a packet with *muti* [traditional African medicine] and healing herbs to her Gogo's hut. The herbs were the only thing that could heal her Gogo.

Within these retellings, Red is practicing the African custom of caring for her elders and showing respect with comfort foods and remedies. This is highlighted again in most retellings when terms of endearment and kinship were almost always written in an African language. Examples include "Mma" for mother, "Tate" for father, "Bhuti" for brother, "Sisi" for sister, and "Gogo" for grandmother. As in the original, the Gogo of the tale is also a main character like Red. The beloved grandmother becomes "Gogo," "Nana," or "Ouma," depending on the linguistic background chosen for the tale (isiZulu/isiXhosa, Setswana, or Afrikaans, respectively). These terms of endearment carry emotional weight as "Gogo" immediately conjures the warmth of an African elder, perhaps more so for these participants than "Grandmother" would. One participant wrote a touching line of dialogue: "'Gogo, ndikuthandile,' Little Red said, as she hugged her grandmother," with a footnote-like aside "'ndikuthandile' means 'I love you' in isiXhosa." Here the use of isiXhosa shows the affectionate relationship between grandmother and granddaughter—even if a reader does not speak isiXhosa, the context makes it clear.

One adaptation portrayed the grandmother as a modern figure, "Gogo Esther, who ran the best spaza shop in the township." Here the grandmother is not a frail old lady in bed, but a small-business owner known in the community, indicating respect for grandmothers as active contributors to family and society. Several stories also give the grandmother a more active role in the climax. One delightful version depicted Gogo as a retired schoolteacher who, upon realising the wolf is impersonating her confronts him directly:

> Gogo Thandiwe was not afraid. She stood tall, looked the baboon in the eye, and scolded him as if he were a naughty schoolboy. The baboon was so taken aback by this that he froze.

Ultimately, this grandmother whacks the baboon with her wooden spoon until he flees. Here, the grandmother becomes the hero, turning the damsel-in-distress trope on its head.

In contrast, the huntsman/woodcutter character was often omitted entirely or replaced with a different rescuer in our retellings. One had a park ranger intervene when he heard Red's scream, but most chose either to have Red or Grandma save themselves, or to have a more collective rescue. For example, one story ends with neighbours responding to Red's cries, resulting in the villain being caught. The collective rescue underscores community, a theme that emerged in several adaptations—instead of a lone hero, it's group effort and solidarity that triumph. This reflects the African ethic of *Ubuntu* (togetherness and mutual care), shifting the tale's structure from a two-character confrontation to a community affair.

These patterns of cultural localisation indicate more than geographical relocation. Rather, they signal a restructuring of the tale's social and moral architecture. This is in line with Hutcheon's (2013) understanding of adaptation as transposition across contexts. The participants replaced

the Grimm Wald with townships, rivers, deserts, and named villages, and transformed cake and wine into umngqusho, vetkoek, rooibos, or muti. They also reimagined the grandmother as gogo, community entrepreneur, or active defender. Such shifts reposition the narrative within recognisable South African social configurations. This cultural retrieval of Indigenous foods, kinship terms, multilingual dialogue, and the use of collective rescue practices, enact what Stanley and Chukwuorji (2024) and Dei (2012) described as Sankofa's pedagogical imperative of returning to local knowledge systems in order to re-ground present meaning-making. The theme of cultural localisation in the retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* therefore functions as an epistemic repositioning rather than decorative embellishment, thereby aligning the literary form with Indigenous spatial, linguistic, and relational logics within contexts in which Foundation Phase students find themselves (Gumbo, 2026; Slater, 2019).

Theme 3: Moral reframing

The third theme and final theme identified in our analysis was that of moral reframing, and considered how participants rearticulated the ethical centre of *Little Red Riding Hood*. While the canonical narrative foregrounds obedience and individual caution, the retellings frequently shift emphasis toward collective responsibility, discernment, and community solidarity. This theme analyses how closing morals, character decisions, and narrative resolutions signal altered value systems. In doing so, the adaptations reveal how moral instruction within children's literature can be recalibrated to reflect communal ethics and relational accountability within contemporary South African contexts.

The classic moral of "don't talk to strangers" remained in some stories, especially those that closely mirrored real-life dangers. However, even when preserved, it was often expanded upon. For example, one story's closing line was: "And Little Red learned that not only should she be careful of strangers, but she should always listen to her mother's warnings." Another example is when one participant had Red's mother give her a warning in both English and isiZulu, saying, "Remember, do not talk to strangers," and then adding, "Ungakhulumi nabangaziwayo, ntombazane!" This switch accomplishes two things: it situates the family in a linguistic community and we now know that they are Zulu-speaking at home, and it emphasises the importance of the message through bilingual reiteration, an idea that has been noted previously.

Another wrote, "She realised that kindness should be given wisely because not everyone who smiles at you is a friend," which refines the stranger-danger message to a more nuanced lesson about discernment. Several adaptations, especially those emphasising community, ended with morals about the importance of community vigilance or family. For instance: "If you are in trouble, call out, your community will help you," or "Family will always come through for you." These are quite different from the individualistic moral of the original and reflect a more collective ethos.

One story was set in a village in KwaZulu-Natal, and the participant described a scene of cows grazing and children playing *umlabalaba* (a local board game) outside Grandmother's home, which evokes a sense of communal life and normalcy. This practice echoes what authors of multicultural literature often do, and shows a promising mindfulness in the participants' writing

that they know how to perform their bilingualism in a way that invites readers in rather than shutting them out (Garcia & Lin, 2017). When participants weave isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, and English into their retellings, they regenerate *Little Red Riding Hood* through lived multilingual realities, embodying the Sankofa principle in linguistic form. This process aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) notion of epistemic freedom, in which re-storying challenges colonial hierarchies of knowledge and repositions local worldviews at the centre of meaning-making.

The inclusion of multilingual dialogue in the retellings reflects more than surface-level code-switching; it aligns with García and Lin's (2017) conception of translanguaging and multilingualism as a pedagogical practice that recognises the participants' full linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making. When participants weave isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, and English into their narrative dialogues, they model the kind of classroom literacy practice that validates linguistic hybridity rather than enforcing monolingual norms. In this context, multilingual storytelling functions as an enactment of multilingual pedagogy, where language choice signals identity, relationality, and cultural grounding. These narrative strategies illustrate how preservice teachers can design literacy tasks that reflect the linguistic realities of South African classrooms while supporting inclusive and context-responsive teaching.

Finally, the moral reframing evident in these retellings shifts the tale's ethical centre from the individual's obedience foregrounded in the original (Zipes, 2014) version, toward relational accountability and collective care. While traces of the original cautionary message remain, they are expanded into lessons about discernment, family responsibility, and community vigilance, reflecting the adaptive capacity of fairy tales to encode shifting social values (Zipes, 1998). The use of bilingual dialogue, communal resolutions, and locally grounded moral statements enables participants to rearticulate the narrative's value system within multilingual and socially embedded contexts, aligning with García and Lin's (2017) understanding of translanguaging and multilingualism as a resource for meaning making. In this way, Sankofa operates in practice because culturally inherited moral scripts are retrieved and reworked through Indigenous ethical frameworks (Dei, 2012; Slater, 2019). Moral instruction thus becomes a site of epistemic repositioning, resonating with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) call for the recentring of local worldviews in knowledge production rather than reproducing inherited European norms.

The findings from this study make three specific contributions to curriculum studies. First, they offer empirical classroom-based evidence from a South African Foundation Phase teacher education context by analysing 30 preservice teacher adaptations of a canonical European fairy tale, extending existing scholarship on the pedagogical use of fairy tales in teacher education (Davies, 2003; Greenhill & Rudy, 2010). Second, they advance a theoretical contribution by operationalising Sankofa within narrative pedagogy, demonstrating how the retrieval of Indigenous symbols, languages, and community ethics can be examined through systematic qualitative analysis rather than treated solely as a philosophical ideal (Dei, 2012; Gumbo, 2026; Stanley & Chukwuorji, 2024). Third, they provide a pedagogical contribution by illustrating how adaptation can function as a structured strategy for culturally responsive literacy

instruction, enabling preservice teachers to recontextualise inherited texts in ways that align with local identities and multilingual realities, consistent with scholarship on adaptation as contextual transposition (Hutcheon, 2013).

Conclusion

This study examined how Foundation Phase preservice teachers were able to adapt *Little Red Riding Hood* through cultural localisation and multilingual narrative practices, and what these reveal for curriculum transformation. The analysis of 30 student-generated narratives identified three themes: symbolic reinterpretation of characters and objects, cultural localisation of setting and kinship practices, and the inclusion of moral reframing toward community-centred ethics. The participants enacted Sankofa in practice by replacing the original red hood with culturally meaningful artefacts, repositioning the wolf within contemporary South African realities, embedding Indigenous languages, and shifting the moral focus from individual obedience to collective responsibility. In foregrounding African narrative reinterpretations of a European canonical tale, this study aligns with broader calls to rebalance knowledge production in early childhood and education scholarship, where African perspectives remain underrepresented (Pence et al., 2023). Although this study is limited to one cohort at a single institution, the findings indicate that structured adaptation tasks can support critical literacy and culturally grounded, multilingual curriculum engagement in teacher education. It is important that future research should extend the analysis across other Bachelor of Education programmes or examine how adapted narratives are implemented in Foundation Phase classrooms.

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