

LBRIS

We know
books
CARINA BRÂNZILĂ

Children's literature, its visual representations and English Language Teaching





Contents

INTRODUCTION	9
PART I: EFL (ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE)	13
1. Research methodologies.....	13
2. Why Children’s Literature?.....	23
3. Children’s books in in EFL (English as a foreign language)	31
4. Cognitive Development and teaching young learners.....	39
5. Teaching English as a foreign language – learning theories...	65
6. Practicalities of teaching with children’s literature	69
 PART II: CHILDREN’S LITERATURE.....	 89
1. Short History of Children’s Literature.....	89
2. Academic perspectives on children’s literature	109
3. Genres Of Children’s Literature	124
4. Fairy tales.....	141
5. Story-telling and its story	153
6. Children’s Verses	166
7. Teaching with poetry.....	178
8. The enchanted realm of Oz.....	191
9. The zany world of Seuss	204
10. The barn of words and friendship.....	210
 PART III: VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS	 221
1. Illustrations and children.....	221
2. Picture Books.....	243
3. Postmodernism in children’s literature	254
4. Teaching with illustrations, picture books and story apps....	262

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS.....	282
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	285
APPENDIX.....	297
A. Lesson ideas used in practice.....	297
I. Image-association lesson ideas for teaching.....	297
II. Lesson ideas based on drama techniques.....	300
III. Lesson ideas based on working with the texts.....	303
B. Scripts from some EFL lessons based on the story <i>The wizard of Oz</i> by Frank Baum.....	308
C. Examples of children's drawings and compositions.....	321



Part I: EFL (English as a foreign language)

1. Research methodologies

Uma Sekaran¹, among others, distinguishes eight benchmarks of scientific research:

1. Purposiveness
2. Rigor
3. Testability
4. Replicability
5. Precision and Confidence
6. Objectivity
7. Generalizability
8. Parsimony

Detailing these, purposiveness means that scientific research needs a definite purpose - the purpose of this work is to offer evidence that children's literature and its visual representations are useful in teaching English as a foreign language, providing real examples and hands-on materials. Rigor refers, according to Sekaran² to a good theoretical background and a sound methodological base - the author made use of some of the best

¹ Sekaran, Uma, *Research Methods*, John Wiley and Sons Inc, 2003, pp. 22-24

² Ibid.

known and well-regarded authors in this respect, drawing upon some of the most respected literature currently available. Testability means that scientific research should have a logical hypothesis which should, in turn, be supported by data - the hypothesis of this paper is, as stated above, that well-chosen children's literature, as well as its visual illustrations of different types is extremely useful in the EFL class; the data collected in the form of questionnaires and interviews is as accurate as possible and supports the hypothesis. Various previous research results, mentioned here, concur to the same conclusion. However, as professor John Unsworth remarks in his lectures on research methods that in Humanities' studies, the best a researcher 'can do is offer a hypothesis that withstands being disproven, for some period of time, until contradictory evidence or a better account of the evidence comes along'³. Replicability, the next benchmark of scientific research in Sekaran's view means that the conclusion and results of the research could and should be replicated if the same type of research is conducted again. This is also demonstrated in this paper, as any EFL educator could verify the research and show from his or her own experience the practicality and usefulness of children's literature and its visual representation in the teaching of young learners. Precision and confidence, as described by Sekaran⁴, refers 'to the closeness of the findings to reality based on a sample [...] our estimations are correct so that we can confidently claim that 95% of the time our results will be true and there is only 5%

³ <http://people.brandeis.edu/~cosler>

⁴ Ibid.

chance of our results being false' - this statement is indeed valid for this paper and the data gathered by the author, sustained by long-term research worldwide, which the paper is based upon, prove the conclusions to be true. The fifth benchmark of a good quality scientific research refers to objectivity and in order to meet these criteria, the author made sure to collect data such as questionnaires and interviews from various teachers and persons, including young learners and their parents and to analyze it with the use of an expert in sociology, in order to avoid any confusion. Generalizability means that the more the possibility to apply the results of the research in a different setting, the more useful the research becomes for the other users. However, this paper mainly refers to pieces of literature adapted to the young learners and their visual representations, specifically used for the young learners. Therefore, the conclusions can be generalized only in the context of a young EFL class, using the same teaching approach and methodological perspective. Different results may be obtained in various contexts, such as private or public schools, or perhaps depending on the different nationalities of students - as some nations are more open and sensitive to different types of children's literature and folklore. Still, the results in such cases will probably differ only slightly, whereas in the case of higher age groups or pieces of literature unsuitable for the age group (too complex, too long, not appropriate for the given class), as well as in the case of badly chosen follow up activities, the results may be quite different and one could even conclude that the hypothesis of this paper was proven wrong. This, however, would contradict years of research and comprehensive studies that have been published

worldwide, to which this paper aligns. In other words, the conclusions of this paper can be generalized in certain given conditions and teaching environments. To change the data of the research, such as the age group, would mean to change the situation altogether, so obviously the results and conclusions may differ to some extent. And finally, the last hallmark of scientific research of Sekaran is represented by parsimony - meaning the simplicity in explaining the phenomenon under scrutiny, rather than making use of an uncontrollable amount of variables - this paper intends to be as clear and parsimonious as possible by using simple, structured data and relying on real life experiences, both personal and drawn from the expertise of established authors.

Scientific research can be generally and broadly divided, particularly regarding sciences, into basic research or applied research. The first type is less goal-oriented and it mostly results in theory while its conclusions tend to be theoretical rather than practical. The second type of research, the applied one, is related and at the same time intertwined with basic research. It differs because it is goal-oriented from the beginning.

In his lecture on the new methods for Humanities research, John Unsworth, professor at the National Humanities Center, observed:

'If we consider humanities research in terms of the basic and the applied, some would say that all humanities research is basic research, because it never aims at having a practical application [...]. On the other hand, if

understanding is a practical outcome, then you might just as easily argue that all humanities research is applied, in that it aims directly at producing a practical outcome, namely changing the way we understand that part of the human record it has in view. Probably the truth is that in the humanities, as in science, both are done: Frye's work on literary archetypes, or Freud's work on the human psyche, or Saussure's work on language, might best be considered basic research: this research is aimed at developing theoretical frameworks, rather than at applying those frameworks to particular objects of attention--even though particular objects are always in view as the theories are developed. In that sense, when we apply those theoretical frameworks to the understanding of particular texts, to illuminate the text rather than to alter or extend the theory, we're doing applied research⁵.

A study on research conduct undergone by the University of Stanford indicates that a 'hallmark of humanistic study is that research is approached differently than in the natural and social sciences, where data and hard evidence are required to draw conclusions'. This is obviously due to the fact that human experience does not reflected in facts and figures. 'Humanities research employs methods that are historical, interpretive and analytical in nature'. Those who conduct humanities research are habitually asking questions about common assumptions, 'uncovering new meanings in artistic works, or finding new ways

⁵ <http://people.brandeis.edu/~unsworth/lyman.htm>

to understand cultural interactions'.⁶ This is certainly a valid observation regarding this paper, as there is a common assumption that literature can contribute to the acquisition of a foreign language and the author aligns to this idea, attempting at the same time to bring a personal, original contribution to this assumption, questioning it and trying to discover some new perspectives on the matter.

As a conclusion, the difference between scientific research and humanities research and their methods may well be not that significant. In fact, they are rather similar, with the single main difference that scientific research can offer accurate, clear and quantifiable results, whereas humanistic methods bring about discussion and raise questions rather than proving facts. In Unsworth's words: 'there is more a difference of degree rather than of kind'⁷. An important aspect that needs to be underlined is that the academic value of any research concerns reliability and credibility; it also concerns the quality of the research methods applied and last but not least the researchers' ethical standards. A more recent added value under scrutiny in this respect is that all serious research should be made available for general peer review, for example by being published, thus excluding any potential inadvertent concerns.

Regarding the research conducted for this paper, an outline of which will be presented in the last chapter, alongside the real questionnaires and interviews applied in practice, a

⁶ <http://shc.stanford.edu/how-humanities-research-conducted>

⁷ <http://people.brandeis.edu/~unsworth/lyman.htm>

complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods was attempted. Research in the field asks today the fundamental question of whether these two approaches can be used together in a relevant manner. However, at the same time, the trend in educational research has been towards using the two methods in conjunction.

Referring to quantitative and qualitative methods of research, first of all it should be stated that Taylor et al's classifications and perspectives were used as reference in defining and explaining the terms per se. Thus, according to Taylor, 'quantitative data is numerical in form – in the form of numbers... Questionnaires and structured interviews are the usual research methods. Some researchers claim that unless human behaviour can be expressed in numerical terms, it cannot be accurately measured', whereas qualitative data 'covers a range of material from the description of social life provided by participant observation and unstructured interviews to information from written sources, such as diaries, autobiographies and novels. Some researchers argue that qualitative data provides greater depth, a richer more detailed picture'⁸

Befring states that 'the quantitative methods include formalized principles that form the basis for a stringent research process that proceeds from formulation of research questions, research design and the selection and analysis of data to interpretations and conclusions. The data will be linked to specific variables, and

^{8 8} Taylor, P. Richardson, J. Yeo, A. Marsh, I. Trobe and Pilkington, A., *Sociology in focus*, Causeway Press, 1995, pp. 76

standardized methods are applied for data collection (for example in expert assessments, observations, interviews or formal testing). The variables can thus be expressed in numerical form, and the data material can be described in the form of tables, graphs or statistical measurements such as averages, variances and correlations, and analyzed with the aid of e.g. analysis of variance, factor analysis or regression analysis⁹.

Another popular approach used in qualitative research regarding education and learning is called grounded theory: a systematic inductive methodology in the social sciences which implies constructing a theory through the analysis of data. It differs consistently from traditional models of research; instead of choosing an existing theoretical framework and collecting data to confirm or infirm the theory in the researched case, it begins with a question or a collection of qualitative data as such. This is what this paper basically did. Starting from some previous related research in the field of stories in the EFL, it gradually observed the existence of relevant data and facts concerning the beneficial use of children's literature in learning English as a second language. The data began to be collected and then a pattern became apparent. Another other scientific research method, perhaps one of the most commonly used, is called the hypothetico-deductive method. It implies a scientific inquiry - the formulating of a hypothesis that would be confirmed or rejected by the consequent research. When the hypothesis is

⁹ Befring, Edvard, *Forskningsmetoder i utdanningsvitenskap*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2015, Retrieved from: <https://www.etikkom.no/en/library/introduction/methods-and-approaches/quantitative-methods/>

informed, the process is called falsification, whereas its confirmation corroborates the initial theory.

Despite its start related to the ground theory, the scientific method used in this paper belongs to this category – the hypothetico-deductive one. The hypothesis of this paper became clear from the very beginning, due to the practical side of this paper – the teaching of English as a foreign language to young learners – and it referred to the utility and relevance of children's literature in teaching English to young learners.

Drawing on studies such as the ones mentioned above, this paper aimed at practically analyzing the impact of high-quality excerpts of children's literature, together with their visual representation both in the context of a public school and that of a private school which offered more resources and possibilities of exploring the pieces of literature. In this respect, two classes of mixed abilities were selected from the public school, while in the case of the private school two different age groups were analyzed. The data collected referred therefore both to mixed abilities and to different ages, as both aspects are relevant for research purposes. The study-lessons were inserted into the curricula so as not to affect the general flow of teaching. The research and data gathering lasted for two school years (a teaching year meaning approximately ten months of continuous teaching input, from September to June). The classes focused mainly on vocabulary, reading and writing and several classes of story-telling were inserted, as well, for variation. Data analysis included detailed observations of the whole class and 30 selected students (20 in the public school and 10 in the private one).

These students represented the case studies per se and they were interviewed by the teacher at the end of each such study-lesson. Their parents were also interviewed in order to assess the impact of teaching methods and their eventual success. Observations followed the participant-observer model, meaning the teacher as observer recorded the process without making judgments. The one-to-one interviews of the students were also as unbiased as possible, aiming to assess the real impact of children's literature in an EFL class through record sheets and verbal interviews. Photography and video recording were also used in some cases, with the parents' written consent. A research study of a specific intervention or phenomenon such as this should include pre-tests and post-tests. However, these were not used in all cases as some of the selected students from the private school ceased coming to classes and therefore were not post-analyzed. However, the author developed a simple yet relevant questionnaire that was applied to several ESL teachers in the geographical area in the form of a few surveys made available online and disseminated via email, too. These surveys aimed to find out about significant teaching experience using children's literature in the case of other fellow teachers. The questionnaire was disseminated via e-mail through the Moldavian Association of English Teachers (MATE), the local School Inspectorate and in the closed Yahoo group of doctoral students from the 'Alexandru I. Cuza' University of Iasi. A total of 53 teachers offered their valuable feedback. The study has of course its limitations and a larger number of students and ESL teachers included in the study would have been more useful and relevant. However, the results and feedback were consistent throughout the study and a high percentage, of more than 89% of

students, parents and fellow teachers responded positively regarding the success of teaching through children's literature. Students enjoyed this teaching approach in all cases and offered positive feedback at all times. Parents seemed happy with the idea and the results reflected in the students' responses in their home environment, whereas fellow teachers answered in an overwhelming majority that they have also observed positive results while teaching with the use of children's literature. The conclusions of the study also emphasized that the type of children's literature selected is of less importance as long as the activities devised in relation to it are of good quality, engaging and interesting for the students. This came as a surprise: even if the literary excerpt used was less appealing, such as in the case of a longer piece of prose for a group of 3rd graders or a poem in the case of the 2nd graders, if the lesson plan managed to envelop the piece of literature in fun teaching activities, the students enjoyed the lesson. They offered positive feedback in the end of the class and at home to their parents afterwards. However, the better selected the piece of literature, the better the feedback - the relation between the two being straightforward. To conclude, for a totally successful lesson, both ends should meet: the literary excerpt should be as appealing as possible and the lesson plan as diversified, interesting and well-developed as possible.

2. Why Children's Literature?

Edna Johnson, Evelyn R. Sickels and Frances Clarke Sayers discuss in their *Anthology of Children's literature* the theory of the