


Chapter 6

Fostering Narrative Empathy Through Picture Books in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Literacy as well as literary education increasingly play an essential role in English as a foreign language pedagogy. This chapter seeks to establish a relationship between the development of literacy and narrative empathy with primary students in the English as a foreign language classroom. After designing a didactic sequence based on picture books and other multimodal resources and then implementing it in a fourth-grade class, the authors qualitatively assessed students' ability to describe and identify in English the feelings and motivations of literary characters. The findings reveal that primary students reflect upon the narrative and affective situations encountered in the stories they read and were able to engage in a process of meaning-making in English.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has shown that literacy can be developed effectively via literary and multimodal texts in the foreign language classroom (Kiefer, 1995; Kern, 2000; Paran, 2008; Kress, 2010; Kucer, 2014; Serafini, 2014; Paesani et al., 2016; Kachorsky et al., 2017; Reyes-Torres, 2020a). One particularly promising avenue for illuminating and enhancing the development of literacy is Narrative Empathy, which Susan Keen defines as “the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another’s situation and condition” (Keen, 2006, 2013). Literacy and Narrative Empathy both feature crucial cognitive processing and emotional involvement dimensions. Although the literacy implications of Narrative Empathy have been explored for adults reading novels (Breithaupt, 2011; Gallagher, 2012; Keen, 2007), the concept merits further research in the context of children’s literature and picture books (Mallan, 2013). We therefore sought to establish a relationship between the development of literacy in English as a foreign language and Narrative Empathy via picture books and other multimodal resources in primary education. To this end, we took part in an Innovation Project carried out at the Universitat de València (UV-SFPIE_GER18-952026) and designed, implemented and evaluated a didactic sequence based on *The Colour Monster* (2012) and *The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes* (2011).

OBJECTIVES

The concepts of literacy and Narrative Empathy share certain principles: both develop through meaning-making and textual reflection. In light of this congruity, our research asks: “In what ways does implementing a Didactic Sequence based on picture books and other multimodal resources develop students’ Literacy and Narrative Empathy in the English as a Foreign Language classroom?” Other key research objectives include:

- To analyze how students understand the situations of literary characters and the implications of this understanding on Narrative Empathy development.
- To assess how the different activities presented in the Didactic Sequence promote students’ ability to reflect upon and explain the emotional states of characters.

After the Didactic Sequence was performed in a grade four class in a public school in the city of Valencia, we asked students to describe and identify the literary

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