

**Literature and Education:
Proposal of an English Literature Program
for Primary, E.S.O and Bachillerato as an
Integrated and Interdisciplinary Tool for TESL,
and Character Education**

Esther de la Peña Puebla

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Boca Raton, Florida
USA • 2013

ISBN-10: 1-61233-411-3
ISBN-13: 978-1-61233-411-0

Dedicated to my family whose integrity, perseverance and generosity have influenced my philosophy of life.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would have never been possible without the participation and support of my students, faculty, friends and family. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors: Dra. Beatriz Hoster Cabo and Dr. Ricardo Navarrete Franco for their unfailing support, encouragement, and necessary constructive criticism throughout this project. Their comments and insights helped me narrow the dissertation from very broad and extensive beginnings into something much more manageable. I would also like to offer heartfelt thanks to the members serving on my committee.

Outside my committee but still within academic circles, Dr. Ballesteros González deserves my gratitude for his encouragement, insight, and for reminding me of the importance of professionalism.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my friends and family. My gratitude goes to my dear friends for their positive perspectives and cheering personality. As for my family, words do not do justice to the amount of patience, encouragement and sympathy they have offered me over the writing of this dissertation.

To all, thank you.

Thomas Dekker

A wise man poor
Is like a sacred book that's never read,—
To himself he lives, and to all else seems dead.
This age thinks better of a gilded fool
Than of a threadbare saint in wisdom's school.
Old Fortunatus.

Jonathan Swift

Books, the children of the brain.
Tale of a Tub. Sect. i.

Maria Edgeworth

In a work upon education, which the public has been pleased to notice, we have endeavoured to show that, under proper management, amusement and instruction may accompany each other through many paths of literature.

Author's preface to *Tales and Novels*

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ABSTRACT

This work seeks to analyze the role that literature has played within the educational sphere throughout the past and recent years, the conflicts derived from the academic views, and how literature is an essential tool for the comprehensive study of a second language, as an integral part of the educational process. The principal aim of the model suggested in this thesis is the introduction of non-traditional approaches to the integration of literary texts, as a cross-curricular interdisciplinary resource for the learning of English as a second language. The literature program here proposed enhances the figure of the teacher and promotes the skills, knowledge, and competences of the students within a multicultural, changing society.

Key Words: Literature, Education, Competence, Second Language Learning, Interdisciplinary.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo persigue analizar el papel que ha desempeñado la literatura a lo largo de los años en el entorno institucional educativo, los conflictos derivados de las diferentes perspectivas académicas, y cómo la literatura constituye una parte esencial e integral en el estudio y aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. El principal objetivo que el modelo propuesto en esta tesis pretende conseguir es la introducción de estrategias no tradicionales que aborden el uso de la literatura en el aula como un recurso integrado e interdisciplinar. El programa sugerido refuerza la figura del profesor y fomenta las habilidades, conocimientos, y competencias de los estudiantes dentro de una sociedad cambiante y multicultural.

Palabras clave: Literatura, Educación, Competencias, Aprendizaje de una Segunda Lengua, Interdisciplinaridad.

LITERATURE AND EDUCATION

Proposal of an English Literature Program for Primary, E.S.O and Bachillerato as an Integrated and Interdisciplinary Tool for TESL, and Character Education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Before you begin the following sheets, I beg you will stop a moment at this Preface, to consider with me what is the true Use of Reading; and if you can fix this Truth with your Minds, namely, that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better, you will then have both Profit and Pleasure from what you read (Sarah Fielding, "Preface" to *The Governess*, 1749: xiii).

For hundreds of years, the role of literature in the foreign language curriculum was unquestioned. It was believed that learners could only appreciate a language through the study of its highest form of expression (Bowler & Parminter, 1993). Literature was seen as the only way to get to know a nation's culture and its people. Even though the literary language was often above the level of the learner, and the vocabulary load unbearable, classes persevered in their laborious word-by-word translation of entire books (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Times changed. The 1970s and 80s saw teachers striving to bring the outside world into their classrooms, and the clear call was for authentic material such as train timetables and newspapers extracts to help learners to cope with the real world. Literature was not so much ousted as put into a corner and forgotten. There was even

some question as to whether literature could be considered authentic or not. The study of literature fell into the academic world where scholars started to debate the conflicts the reading of literature could arise in class.¹

Perhaps we have now achieved a more reasonable balance. Literature can be taught in an interesting, critical and eye-opening way. From Primary to Bachillerato, the possibilities of integrating literary texts in the different curricula are many, and it should be seriously considered.

The proposal presented in this work is based on three assumptions, which are basically interlaced through the didactic design suggested.

The first assumption corresponds to the concept of intelligence that Marina² explains: “La inteligencia no es un ingenioso sistema de respuestas, sino un incansable sistema de preguntas. No vive a la espera del estímulo, sino anticipándolos y creándolos sin parar. Todas las operaciones mentales se reorganizan al integrarse en proyectos” (1998: 43).

The second premise is directly related to the first one and accounts for the implementation of literature at school, as a fundamental resource in the foundation of competent citizens. As Lledó³ argues: “La literatura no es sólo principio y origen de libertad intelectual, sino que ella misma es un universo de idealidad libre, un territorio de la infinita posibilidad. Los libros son puertas que nadie podría cerrarnos jamás, a pesar de todas las censuras” (*El País*, Cultural, 21/12/2002).

The third principle that undermines this work explores the need, over the years, to research new methodological approaches to improve the teaching of English as a

¹ For further discussion see: Gerald Graff's *Literature Against Itself*, chapter one, University of Chicago Press, 1979.

² José Antonio Marina. *Teoría de la inteligencia creadora*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1998: 149; 1ª Edición, 1993.

³ Emilio Lledó. “La necesidad de la literatura”, en prensa, diario *El País*, Cultural, 21/12/2002. <http://www.redeseducacion.net/literatura1.htm>

second language, and create new possibilities to make the learning process more accessible and fun.

Consequently, the following chapters will aim at explaining how literary texts in English can and should be implemented in the ESL class (Garcia, 2007; O'Sullivan & Rösler, 2002), in order to provide students with a comprehensive educational foundation.

Chapter II explores the historical development of teaching methodology in language class, to concentrate on specific approaches and methods concerning the teaching and learning of a second language. This revision provides the reader with an all-inclusive understanding of past and new teaching theories, procedures, and practices. The knowledge of the wide range of ideas and strategies that are nowadays being used is of great importance in order to be able to conceive the role that literature can and should play in the TESL.

Chapter III intends to offer the reader a clear exposition of the role that literature has played over the years within the academic world, in order to enable him/her understand the current situation regarding its instruction. Furthermore, the many relevant contributions that the use of literature adds to the teaching and learning of ESL are studied from different angles and points of view. Finally, the positive outcomes that literature brings about in the educational foundation of students will be supported by its implications in the improvement of the learners' general core competences, and personal growth.

Chapter IV is focused on the character education of students and its relevance in the educational process. Considering the importance of the inclusion of literature in the curriculum as a resource to develop critical thinking and ethical values, this chapter

aims at demonstrating how the reading of literary works can help students understand the world around them in a broader way.

Chapter V deals with the general methodological models proposed for both cycles of education: Primary and Secondary. Analyses of the major pros and cons are included to provide a realistic panorama of the possibilities and difficulties concerning the proposed program. Samples of common resources are shown, and the evaluation system explained.

Chapter VI deepens into the features that shape the literature program proposed for TESL. Thus, this section embraces a definition of children's literature, a brief historical revision of its development, genres, and the main reasons intended for its implementation in both cycles of the compulsory educational system.

Chapter VII concentrates on the literary program proposed for the Primary Cycle. The choice of picture books is explained and justified both theoretically and in the EFL context of this work. Therefore, picture books are integrated in the Plastic and Visual Art Education class, which will enable students to learn English and Art through a CLIL/AICLE⁴ proposal. Didactic units are gradually sequenced and methodological approaches discussed.

Chapter VIII is fully devoted to the literary program proposed for the Secondary Cycle. Important considerations that shape the cognitive development and emotional character during the adolescent years are examined in order to support the selection of the works suggested. The complete program also includes additional resources and templates to use alternatively in class.

⁴CLIL/ AICLE: Content and Language Integrated Learning/ Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras.

1.1. State of the Problem

The study of English as a second Language has often been ruled by a linguistic approach which usually neglects literary texts as a source of input for the students. Despite the vast amount of textual material available, and the number of hours of instruction, European institutional reports⁵ confirm that little improvements are being made in Spain concerning second language acquisition, especially due to the lack of appropriate language skills.

In Spain, the study of literature has hardly ever been considered as an integrated tool for a better comprehensive acknowledgement of the English language in Primary or Secondary education. For this reason, the lack of awareness of the methodological strategies to approach the vast resources literary texts can offer is another major problem to examine. Moreover, the resistance of students to read books as part of the learning process, in their second language acquisition, is also reinforced by the fact that the traditional reading techniques employed in class disregard their active participation in the construction of a critical perspective, and bore the learner with a passive individual reading approach.

1.2. Aim

This study seeks to provide an all-inclusive methodological support of the use of literary texts in order to engage teachers and students in a communicative process that will foster the second language acquisition of students, and will enhance the learners' competences in the four traditional skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Moreover, literary texts are presented as examples of social realities, posing dilemmas

⁵ For a complete study on this issue , see the European Commission Report Website:
http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/134EN.pdf

and conflicts, and thus inviting to classroom interaction. The impact of critical debates and reasoning through the reading and discussing of books will help students develop a solid character personality in their future lives. To conclude, the wide range of resources and opportunities the teaching and reading of literary texts can offer in the syllabus of any course is not to be underestimated by any discipline, much less in language learning (Carter, 1996: 92).

1.3. Significance of the Study

If one considers the new demands and expectations in the education of students nowadays, the result is that programs are designed to stimulate and develop interest in individual learning competence, reliability in problem solving, and respect for multiculturalism. However, the reality is that the processes through which students try to pursue those objectives are not always successful: “Es en la etapa educativa de Secundaria donde se mantiene el reto español de alcanzar los promedios de la OCDE”⁶.

The integration of literature within the syllabus of the course will not only facilitate the study of a new language, but will also contribute to bring about new perspectives on education. The awareness of literary genres, the critical reading and interpretation of texts, the historical context, the research and creative writing about universal themes, all of those are activities of undeniable value for a comprehensive education. If we want our students to cope with the new intellectual demands of the world today, educators must provide them with the tools to cultivate their critical abilities, and develop new ones. As it has been previously mentioned, a neglected part of TESL

⁶ For further data analysis, see the OCDE report on Education in Spain, 2011: <http://www.educacion.gob.es/dctm/ministerio/horizontales/prensa/documentos/2011/09/informe-espanol-panorama-de-la-educacion-2011.pdf?documentId=0901e72b80ebfbb1>

education in Spain concerns the use of literary texts as a complimentary tool for language learning, critical development, and interdisciplinary study. The purpose of the proposal presented in this work started with an initial inquiry which intended to examine and understand the students' thoughts and attitudes towards the study of literature as an integrated tool in English. The number of students surveyed⁷ corresponded to all in the third cycle of Primary (courses 5 and 6) and all Secondary Courses, including 1st Bachillerato; total number of 420 students. A 15% of the students' results were no valid for errors and/ or incomplete answers. Thus, 357 students were correctly surveyed. Parents and teachers were also invited to participate in the following questionnaire to back up the implementation of the literature program suggested. The number of parents who answered the questionnaire was 250 out of 420. The total number of teachers-participants was 20. All the questions are here reproduced in its original form.

Para alumnos:

¿Lees habitualmente? ¿Cuántos libros al año?

Results showed that 30% of the 357 students surveyed would not read on a regular basis.

58% would read an average between 2-4 books a year.

12% would read more than 4 books a year.

¿Qué aspectos mejorarías en la enseñanza del inglés actual?

85% of students agreed in the need to improve communicative competence.

¿Le atribuyes importancia a la literatura en la educación en valores? En caso afirmativo, ¿por qué?

75% D/N N/A.

⁷ The survey corresponds to the German School "Albrecht Dürer", 2007-10. A former implementation of the same program had been carried out for three years during my stay at Highlands School, 2005-7.

5% No.

20% of students answered yes; most considered that literature helped them understand other viewpoints and get to know other cultures.

Para padres: (250 participants)

¿Qué libros recuerdas haber leído durante la adolescencia que, de alguna manera, te dejaran huella?

27% admitted that they would not read as adolescents.

15% would only read comics.

35% Adventures & detective books (Enid Blyton; Julio Verne; Michael Ende; Arthur Conan Doyle)

23% Other contemporary classic authors: Herman Hesse, Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda, José Luis Borges...

¿Qué aspectos reforzarías en la enseñanza del inglés actual?

84% outlined the poor communicative competence of their children in English.

¿Ves útil la enseñanza de la literatura en relación a la enseñanza del inglés?

55% answered yes.

45% responded no.

¿Le atribuyes importancia a la literatura en la educación en valores? En caso afirmativo, ¿por qué?

48% of parents concluded that it is only the family the one responsible and really influential in the education of human values concerning their children.

52% considered important reading in the process of character education.

Para profesores: (20 participants)

¿Qué libros recuerdas haber leído durante la adolescencia que, de alguna manera, te dejaran huella?

15% (3 teachers: 2 of the Science department) admitted not having read at all during their adolescent years.

60% Adventure, terror and detective stories; (12 teachers).

15% Contemporary classic authors; (3 teachers).

10% only comics; (2 teachers).

¿Qué aspectos reforzarías en la enseñanza del inglés actual?

100% would reinforce the communicative competence.

¿Ves útil la enseñanza de la literatura en relación a la enseñanza del inglés?

80% (16 teachers) answered yes.

20% (4 teachers) responded no.

¿Le atribuyes importancia a la literatura en la educación en valores? En caso afirmativo, ¿por qué?

70% (14 teachers) argued that literature can be a mirror of human experiences.

30% (6 teachers) asserted that parents and family are the only determinant factors in the character education of their children.

In further meetings and tutorials, parents and instructors considered the teaching of English basically repetitive and insufficient for the current demands of society. Oral production, communicative competence, was pointed out as the poorest of the four skills practiced and developed. Along with that particular need, the general notion of critical thinking and character formation were valued as necessary and fundamental for a comprehensive education at school. Literature was viewed among parents and teachers as essential in all aspects of education. For students, literature was regarded as prescriptive and teacher-centered. Therefore, considering the general atmosphere in relation to the current teaching of English in particular, it seemed recommendable to propose an alternative methodology which provided insights on teaching as well as

other disciplines. This would underline the effectiveness of ESL learning, and other aspects of education.

1.4. Basic Assumptions for the Study

Four basic assumptions can be acknowledged from the empirical research done to students, teachers, and parents.

- 1 Reading appears to be more important for teachers and parents than for students. The books that parents and teachers recalled as important in their lives mostly corresponded to classic works of well-known authors. Students of Primary seemed to enjoy reading more than Secondary students. However, adolescents do recognize the importance of reading, but admit having little interest in it, as the reading they have done at school has been mandatory and boring. For those who would read often, titles matched the best-seller lists, such as: the *Twilight* sequel, *Harry Potter* saga, and *The Hunger Games*.
- 2 The teaching of English is considered ineffective and monotonous. Oral production is understood as poor. Literature appears as a new potential tool to engage students in alternative activities concerning English and other fields of study. All the impressions and attitudes of students and parents concerning this new perspective were positive and supportive.
- 3 There was a deep general concern about character education and the values being taught at school, which were broadly identified as diffuse and insufficient. The lack of this practice is recognized as an important factor often neglected in the current educational system. Parents and students advocate for a major implication of teachers in this issue, while instructors show reluctance and feel deterred to get

involved in any kind of ethical, moral enterprise. Most teachers admit their little professional formation and guidance for such important task.

Thus, this all-inclusive, cross curricular proposal intends to serve as a motivating material for instructors and students who wish to challenge the current approaches to teaching English in compulsory education.

1.5 Results and Conclusions

Quality of life is directly tight to our ability to think clearly amid the noise of modern life, to sift through all that competes for our attention until we find what we value, what will make our lives worth living, what we value is seldom on the surface and, when it is found, can seldom be defended from the incursions of the trivial without sustained efforts to understand it more deeply. A society in which the habits of disciplined reading, analysis, interpretation, and discourse are not sufficiently cultivated has much to fear (Theodore Sizer, 1984: 58).

The implementation of the proposal of the English Literature Program suggested in this work as an Integrated and Interdisciplinary Tool for TESL, and Character Education for both cycles of compulsory education has proved to be an asset for the students involved in the program. Throughout my eighteen years of experience as a teacher, there have been several aspects which have been very rewarding and stimulating for me. A remarkable one has been seeing student participation broaden, and interest in the English language and culture increase as a result of the reading of literary works. Motivation and engagement, along with the development of conversational and literacy skills are as important as critical thinking and personal growth. Therefore, I understand that the program here suggested contributes to enhance qualified students and future competent citizens.