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## Trabajo de Investigación

### Picturebooks in Primary School:

### Developing Visual Literacy & Critical Thinking Skills in EFL

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## Abstract

This research work intends to show how picturebooks can be used in the EFL lesson of primary school to develop visual literacy and critical thinking skills in young learners. The experiences described are taken from a series of lessons carried out with 1<sup>st</sup> form children attending a state-run school in the south of the City of Buenos Aires. The experiences consist of multiple readings of a picturebook by Anthony Brown called *Me and You*, a writing-back of the classic story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The approach taken for the development of such experiences was first to introduce children to the story by the use of an illustrated and adapted version of the classic. Then, children were introduced to Anthony Browne's version. In this first reading children were given time to look at the pictures while the EFL teacher read aloud the story. In a second reading, the EFL teacher asked questions related to the play between images and text, the intertextual references found in the story and children's own interpretation of the plot, the two storylines and other symbolic elements present in the pictures. Finally, children's answers are analysed in terms of visual literacy, critical thinking skills and the role of the teacher as a mediator between the children and the picturebook.

**Keywords:** visual literacy – critical thinking – young learners – EFL – picturebooks

## Resumen

El presente trabajo intenta mostrar cómo los libros álbum pueden ser usados en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera y en el nivel primario de enseñanza para contribuir al desarrollo de la alfabetización visual y del pensamiento crítico en niños pequeños. Las experiencias que se describen se extraen de una serie de experiencias áulicas llevadas adelante con alumnos de primer grado de una escuela de gestión pública ubicada en un barrio al sur de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Las experiencias consistieron de múltiples lecturas de un cuento de Anthony Browne titulado *Me and You*, una reescritura contra-hegemónica del clásico *Ricitos de Oro y los Tres Osos*. El abordaje implementado para el desarrollo de dichas experiencias consistió en presentar primero el clásico a los niños mediante un cuento ilustrado y adaptado al nivel para luego trabajar con el libro-álbum de Browne. En una primera lectura, la docente lee el cuento y muestra sus imágenes para que los niños puedan escuchar y mirar. En una segunda lectura, se vuelve sobre el texto y la imagen mientras se indaga a los niños sobre el juego entre estos elementos, sobre las referencias a otros textos o clásicos (intertextualidad), sobre la trama (o tramas), simbolismos y las propias interpretaciones de los chicos. Finalmente, las respuestas e intervenciones son analizadas de acuerdo con las categorías de alfabetización visual, pensamiento crítico y el rol del docente como mediador entre los lectores y el libro-álbum.

**Palabras claves:** alfabetización visual – pensamiento crítico – niños pequeños – enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera - libros álbum

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## Introduction

... “and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversation?”

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Carrol, L. 1865)

*Drawing is another way of thinking.*

Edward Bawden<sup>1</sup>

The present work has a diverse origin. It extends from some personal reflections carried out during my attendance at the seminar *Children’s Literature I* as a graduate trainee during the first and second term of the year 2013, the bibliography consulted during that time, the personal experience in working with five to ten year old children in state schools in the City of Buenos Aires for over six years now, and from seminars, courses and exhibitions attended in Argentina and abroad regarding children’s literature, its history, children’s picturebooks, visual culture and the art and didactics of visual and oral storytelling.

Starting off with the works of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Brunner about the study of children and their socio-cognitive development, Michael Pressley’s research on literacy, Perry Nodelman’s discussions on common assumptions about childhood and Martin Salisbury’s and Morag Styles’s reconstruction and account of the history of children’s picturebooks, this work intends to examine how literature, in particular children’s picturebooks, can be used in the English Foreign Language (EFL) and in the schooling language<sup>2</sup> (Spanish) to contribute to the development of children’s critical thinking skills and visual literacy from a very young age<sup>3</sup>. It will be argued that

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bawden (1903-1983) was an English painter, illustrator and graphic artist, known for his paints, book covers, posters and garden metalwork furniture.

<sup>2</sup> I avoid the terms Mother Tongue or First Language since these children’s mother tongue (the language they first acquired or were exposed to in their homes) may not always be Spanish, as some of them are first generation Argentines, born from parents coming from neighbouring countries, such as Perú, Paraguay or Bolivia. Consequently, they and/or their families may also speak Quechua, Aymará or Guaraní, and Spanish cannot always be considered their mother tongue or first language.

<sup>3</sup> By “children” I refer to my own experience in relation to the groups of children I have worked and been in contact with for over 6 years now. My intention here is not to generalise and speak of children’s traits globally. The groups of children I have worked with, in general, belong to a low-income class residing in impoverished areas of the city of Buenos Aires. Interestingly, most of the “literary” and “artistic” experiences these children have (access to picturebooks, stories, visual arts, etc.) take place in the school. From the personal experiences regarding the use of picturebooks I have carried out with my group of children, I can state that children were hooked by the images, their content (colour, texture, shape, size, the small details,

learning to *see*, *read* and *decode* visual forms and images has major relevance in the field of today's educational development, especially in the field of literacy, and that it can have a positive impact on children's both personal and cognitive growth.

Although there is no one comprehensive or clear definition of the term 'visual literacy', most of us may be familiar with what 'reading' images and multimodal texts<sup>4</sup> is; a skill that involves the understanding of both visual and textual elements in combination. In an attempt to throw some light on this contentious term, Martin Salisbury and Morag Style in *Children's Picturebooks* find some interesting concepts in short-film maker Kate Raney's definition of visual literacy: "[it is] the history of thinking about what images and objects mean, how they are put together, how we respond to or interpret them, how they might function as modes of thought, and how they are seated within the societies that gave rise to them" (2012: 77)<sup>5</sup>. From Raney's words derives the logical implication that the ability to recognise objects is not really 'seeing', and that the term 'seeing' needs to be re-signified when talking about visual literacy and when working with multimodal texts, such as picturebooks.

'Seeing' has always been associated with a natural ability, one of the five senses human beings are normally born with. It is usually the term 'looking' the one associated with a less obvious ability, that of consciously paying attention to an object, scene, sequence of scenes, etc. While 'seeing' is an unconscious/passive activity, 'looking' demands focus, awareness and attention on the part of the viewer or spectator. However, because 'seeing' is considered, precisely, a natural capacity that needs no apparent learning, in the field of visual literacy the term is reconsidered and resignified to unveil what is natural (obvious and unquestioned): *seeing* is an ability and it is natural, but the message or messages an image encodes, how this is conveyed and how human beings interpret them (images and messages) are not obvious. If we ourselves want to be conscious about the processes that reading images involve, and so become competent readers of these texts, we need to start *seeing* (and *thinking*) images differently –that is, not just as decorative elements of our everyday life, but as powerful semiotic elements carrying multiple levels of meaning<sup>6</sup>. And if

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etc.) and what they transmit (feelings, tone, sounds, smells, etc.), proving that picturebooks can be a tool for the development of visual literacy and critical thinking from a very young age.

<sup>4</sup> Multimodal texts refer to the integration of different modes of texts to create and convey meaning and messages. The 'modes' include audio, visual and spatial design. Multimodal texts are not only electronic texts but also photos, magazines, picturebooks, videos, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Kate Raney specialises in digital formats that combine live action and animation.

<sup>6</sup> Although it is not my intention here to expand on the theory of semiotics and how this is applied to the study of images (the rhetoric images) I consider that a brief introduction to concepts related to the analysis of images (text, image, message, sign, symbol, denotation, connotation, etc.) are essential to become more conscious 'readers' and, most importantly, *mediators* of images, that is, mediators between the images and the audience, for example, the pictures in a book and the children 'reading' them.

we want our students to be better prepared to *read* these semiotic elements, *seeing* needs to be taken to a higher level, that is, to the level of analysis. If not, students who fail to *see* as critically as they *read* written texts, as it will be developed later on, could only be considered ‘partially’ literate in today’s highly visual world.

Learning to *see*, *decode* and *respond* to contextualised visual materials critically, therefore, can be the first steps towards the development of critical thinking in children, which involves, as well, many processes and skills. Critical thinking can be defined as the active and skillful processes of conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising and evaluating information in order to reach a conclusion. This may seem an impossible task for young learners and teachers to embark on. However, it will be proved, with concrete examples taken from the experiences in working with picturebooks and children at school that in their answers and interventions we find simple but clear instances of critical thought, which show that critical thinking can be encouraged and developed in young children<sup>7</sup>.

Going back to the definition of critical thinking, this states that it does not simply involve one skill, but actually many. Critical thinking, therefore, is a highly complex process of multiple skills that need to be developed through the provision of appropriate problem-solving situations in, ideally, a proper context and on a daily basis. The most suitable problem-solving situations find their place in children’s common environments: first at home with their parents, siblings and other adults and children, and then at kindergarten and at school, when schooling becomes mandatory. At this point school life becomes an important, if not the most important, part of a child’s ordinary life. The amount of time that children spend and the amount of experiences that they undergo at school will have a major impact on their current social, affective and cognitive development and on their future lives as adults. Therefore, it is within the context of the school life and with the active role of teachers as mediators that critical thinking can and should be developed at full capacity.

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<sup>7</sup> To exemplify this, I will resort to an anecdote that springs from one of the experiences I have recorded for this work and that I will develop later on. While reading the picturebook *Me and You*, by Anthony Browne, with a group of first-form children, I ask them why the story of the girl is in “gris”, the colour children had said the story to be in. One of the boys answered: “porque está triste porque pierde a la mamá”. Here we see how children are able to first see and recognise a plastic element of the story (colour grey), decode it by associating it with a specific feeling (sadness), and finally put the two together to interpret the author’s decision: it is grey because the girl is sad, and the girl is sad because she loses her mother (synthesis). Here we can also appreciate how children are familiar with the colour codes of their cultural context (red for anger, yellow for happiness, green for hope, grey for sadness, etc.).

## About this work and its content

The present work has been thought and conceived as a research work. The analysis and conclusions at the end of it derive from a number of classroom-library experiences carried out with a group of five to seven year old children from a state school in the city of Buenos Aires during the year 2014. The observations and recordings of children's comments and responses to working with a picturebook in the EFL lesson and at the library conform the data that was then used for the subsequent analysis and conclusions.

This work is divided into seven major sections which serve as the backbone of the proposed research. The first section, entitled **Theoretical Framework**, has the purpose of revising concepts that relate to literacy, cognitive growth, the teaching of a foreign language and the role of teachers and young learners today. The following section, **The Picturebook and the Child**, delves into this relatively new genre in children's literature called *picturebooks* and how they relate to children's world and the role they can play in their personal and cognitive growth. The third section, entitled **Research Work**, provides important information about the characteristics of the experience and its participants, such as context, children's backgrounds and the material used. This information intends to clarify, as well, the procedure and objectives of this research work. The fourth section, given the title of **Experiences and Observations**, conforms a detailed account of how the experiences with the children and the picturebook were carried out. The fifth section, entitled simply **Analysis**, presents, precisely, the analysis of all relevant data regarding the main topics that the work addresses: critical thinking, visual literacy and teachers as mediators. Then come the **Conclusions** and a **Final comments** section, which contains some personal reflections about this work, the process of making it and further enquiries about the topics of childhood, education, critical thinking and visual literacy to continue thinking and exploring in the future.

This is so far, and on one level, an introduction to the present work. However, this is as well, and on another level, an invitation; my personal invitation for you to read this work and to join me throughout this journey.

If you are a dreamer, come in,  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire  
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!

*Invitation* (Shel Silverstein)



“Congratulations!  
Today is your day.  
You're off to Great Places!  
You're off and away!”

*Oh, The Places You'll Go!* (Dr. Seuss: 1990)

## 1. Theoretical Framework

### 1.1. Defining Literacy: What do we talk about when we talk about literacy?

In the field of foreign language teaching and learning, and in the field of literacy development in general, great importance is given to the study of four distinctive linguistic skills: *listening*, *reading*, *speaking* and *writing*. According to the *Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras* (DCLE). *Niveles 1, 2, 3 y 4* (GCABA, 2001) these four skills constitute the crucial contents (the backbone) from which all the other linguistic contents are organised<sup>8</sup>. However, the development of these four skills alone is not enough; a child who has learnt to *speak*, *listen*, *read* and *write* in a foreign language, or even in their own mother tongue/schooling language, has not necessarily become 'literate'. As Wragg *et al.* observe about the different concepts of 'literacy' in *Improving Literacy in the Primary School*, "people can be 'functionally' literate with only rudimentary concepts." (1998: 26).

Literacy does not start with the beginning of school and finishes with the completion of the first cycle in the primary level or with primary school, as it might be commonly but mistakenly thought about. In *Cómo Enseñar a Leer*, Pressley refer to a number of researchers in the field of literacy development to affirm that

[...] the development of literacy starts off the moment the individual is born, since in children's previous life to school there are many factors that contribute to the development of literacy. These include games and ludic activities, the interaction with adults during dinner time, the mass media children and parents have access to (e.g., watching documentaries or educational programmes), the outings (e.g., to the library), the readings, the writings and the drawings (Baker and others, 1994).] (1999: 93)<sup>9</sup>

Literacy, therefore, can be understood as an on-going process that takes a lifetime, so long as there exists the shared belief that literacy must consist of something more than just knowing how to *listen*, *read*, *speak* and *write*.

As John McRae points out in *Literature with a Small "l"*, there is another ability that is too often neglected, and it is that of 'thinking' in the target language. He calls it "the fifth skill" (1991: 5) and explains how the ideational or representational language can be essential for the construction of meaning. According to McRae, ideational or representational language refers to language which,

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<sup>8</sup> The complete and original sentence from the DCLE reads like this: "Los quehaceres de *escuchar*, *leer*, *hablar* y *escribir* en lengua extranjera, involucradas en las prácticas de *comprensión* y *producción*, constituyen los contenidos cruciales a partir de los cuales se organiza la propuesta de todos los contenidos del área." (2001, 40)

<sup>9</sup> [My translation]. The original words in Spanish are: "(...) el desarrollo de la alfabetización comienza con el nacimiento, dado que en la vida de los niños en edad preescolar existen muchos factores que inciden en el desarrollo de su alfabetización. Estos incluyen los juegos y las actividades lúdicas, las interacciones con los adultos durante la hora de comer, los medios de comunicación a los que acceden los niños y sus padres (p.ej., ver documentales o programas educativos), las salidas (p.ej., a las biblioteca), la lectura, la escritura y el dibujo (Baker y otros, 1994)."

in order that its meaning be decoded, it engages the imagination of the receiver (it appeals or influences the addressee). In McRae's words, "representational language opens up, calls upon, stimulates and uses areas of the mind, from imagination to emotion, from pleasure to pain (...)." (1991: 3).

It could be stated, therefore, that appealing to this aspect of the language (i.e. using materials that favour personal interactions and cognitive processes) will not only involve students emotionally but also help them to put their own critical thinking skills into practice when trying to decode and/or encode meaning and talk or write about it. It is, then, the capacity of decoding and encoding meaning, of verbalising or writing a thought or an emotion, of arguing about a picture or a statement, etc. that makes people 'critical' and 'literate' -not just the abilities to *listen*, *speak*, *read* and *write* in isolation or *per se*. In Paulo Freire's terms, someone has acquired 'literacy' the moment he or she can read the world and act upon it (Freire, 1970). Thus, making sense of a text (any text, in any mode) is nothing less than an act of personal construction (of both deconstruction and reconstruction of the self); the doorway towards free thought (one's own and personal liberation) and the questioning and challenge of assumptions and dominant discourses.

## **1.2.Children's cognitive and socio-affective development**

According to the conclusions that Jean Piaget derived from his observations on children's behaviour and the construction of knowledge, children go through a series of identifiable developmental stages (Piaget, 1961, 1986). In brief, children from two to six years old are said to be in the preoperational stage, where they begin to use symbols and are characterised for their egocentricity. Children from six to eleven are in the concrete operational stage, where they start to understand basic concepts that relate to the world, but only at a concrete level. Finally, it is the age group from eleven to fifteen that children can start handling abstract concepts, since they enter the formal operational stage.

Piaget's studies on children's behaviour and the stages they undergo in the construction of knowledge brought about milestone contributions to the field of education (the so-called 'constructivist' schools) and, more specifically, to the development of more detailed/accurate theories of teaching and learning in many areas of study. Many educators, experts on different fields and teachers have read, studied and taken Piaget's observations or the schools of thought derived from his writings into their own practices in the educational system, especially in the formal education of young and very young learners.

Some educators, however, have also misinterpreted, overgeneralized and/or misapplied Piaget's contributions to the construction of knowledge, having not realised that Piaget's observations correspond more to the psychological sphere rather than to the pedagogical one. In the

field of literacy, for example, Emilia Ferreiro (in Kaufmann *et al.*, 2000) comments critically on the way Piaget's constructivist theory was applied pedagogically. Ferreiro observes four big temptations when bringing Piaget's theories on the construction of knowledge to school. The first one consists in considering that the notions children develop can be taught as if they were part of the educational contents in the curriculum, when in reality notions and logical operations in general cannot be taught. The second temptation can be considered in opposition to the former: since notions and logical operations cannot be taught, nothing can be done at school but wait until they appear naturally in children. This is a big mistake since a teacher can do a lot to favour different cognitive processes to take place; teachers can provide a literate environment, foster problem-solving situations, pose questions, etc. to create a learning context for children to develop these notions and logical operations.

The third temptation consists in consulting Piaget's work to decide which content is to be given one year or the other. This idea entails the notion that there exists a normal age (generally an average age) for children to develop certain notions and concepts. Therefore, some teachers may put all children of a certain age (generally his/her group of children that year) into a fast and hard stage; all children belonging to this stage will be expected to think, do and feel more or less in the same way. If this is not happening, then teachers may run the risk of interpreting that there must be a problem with one (or some) of these children. The fourth and last temptation consists, simply, in applying Piaget's theory as a recipe. From all four misconceptions, I dare say that the second and third temptations have major and significant importance to the present work -the development of visual literacy and critical thinking skills in young learners- as they may hinder rather than encourage the development of children's abilities to see and think more critically.

Another consequence of the application of Piaget's theory as a recipe to teaching-learning processes at school is observed by César Coll (1990). Paraphrasing Coll, in most pedagogical applications of Piaget's theory, the learner is conceived as an isolated individual that must discover the properties of the objects and even the properties of their own actions all by themselves, and without any help or support from others. This way, knowledge is conceived as a personal-natural process, underestimating any interaction that the individual can have with their social environment and the role that others play in the construction of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This conception has had, for

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<sup>10</sup> César Coll's actual words are: "Así, en la mayoría de las aplicaciones pedagógicas de base piagetiana, el alumno es percibido como un ser socialmente aislado que debe descubrir por sí solo las propiedades de los objetos e incluso de sus propias acciones, viéndose privado de toda ayuda o soporte que tenga su origen en otros seres humanos. La centración casi exclusiva en las interacciones entre el alumno y un medio esencialmente físico lleva aparejado un menosprecio por las interacciones del alumno con su medio social y, por supuesto, de los posibles efectos de estas últimas sobre la adquisición del conocimiento." (1990: 113)

example, major consequences in the field of ‘correction’ and in the role of teachers in the classrooms. Misinterpreting that teachers should not ‘correct’ any children’s mistakes or intervene at all in the discovering-learning processes that children undergo –fearing these might be anti-constructivist procedures-, mistakes are not worked on and learning processes are not carried out, precisely, constructively. Paraphrasing Kaufmann *et al.*, mistakes, from a constructivist view, are not to be avoided or sanctioned, but they are to be accepted and worked on to overcome them.<sup>11</sup>

However, as Coll (2000) also adds, a sector of the School of Geneva, headed by Doise, Mugny and Perret-Clermont, has questioned the reductionist view on Piaget’s theoretical applications, and has focused more on the socio-cognitive aspect of the individual’s learning environment, especially that which involves the interaction with peers. The analysis of the relations that children establish among themselves and with their environment can contribute to our understanding of the cognitive processes that are at the bottom of all socialization processes<sup>12</sup>. This is why Coll writes about the importance of how activities should be organised in school, and how cooperative activities favour more significant learning processes than competitive or individualistic ones.

As mentioned before, the discrete stages that Piaget describes and that are simplified in the first paragraph of this section coincide with crucial moments in the formal education life of the child (i.e. schooling) and may have, as exposed above, profound implications. In the teaching of a FL, for example, children may only be exposed to certain types of materials, especially those designed according to their age and level. As well, children might only be encouraged to give an opinion or to make interpretations of a text or of an image when they have learned, for example, the proper vocabulary and structures, or when they can manage certain skills -especially the linguistic skills of *reading*, *writing* and *speaking*. Another consequence that this overgeneralisation of Piaget’s cognitive theory may bring is the interpretation that only children of a certain age-group can manage abstraction or certain feelings, such as empathy, leaving out material that could be both rich for the development of literacy (textual and visual literacy), critical thinking and children’s socio-affective skills.

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<sup>11</sup> Kaufmann’s *et al.* actual quote is: “La hipótesis principal es que el error constructivo no se evita, sino que se acepta su aparición y no se sanciona, sino que se trabaja para su superación”. (2000: 35)

<sup>12</sup> César Coll’s actual words are: “(...) un sector de la Escuela de Ginebra, encabezado por Doise, Mugny y, sobre todo, Anne Nelly Perret-Clermont, ha cuestionado esta reducción y ha focalizado sus esfuerzos investigadores en el análisis de las relaciones que el niño mantiene con una parcela de su medio social, concretamente con sus compañeros e iguales. La idea de partida de estos autores es que, en el marco interpretativo de la teoría genética, el análisis de las relaciones entre iguales puede contribuir a enriquecer nuestra comprensión de los procesos que están en la base de la socialización y del desarrollo intelectual del ser humano.” (1990: 114)

If not taken with the appropriate caution, Piaget's clear-cut and well-defined stages can lead, as stated before, to overgeneralizations about childhood. These, in turn, can derive into simplifications, assumptions and/or misconceptions about children's capacities, both emotional and cognitive. But Piaget's writings also observe that children *do* need new ideas and different experiences in order to move to another stage of knowledge, which constitutes the basis of the assimilation-accommodation process that he proposes for the construction of knowledge. So the perception that certain material, the handling of specific subjects and topics or the requirement of a certain level of analysis might not yet be suitable or possible for children is, at least, a questionable assumption. Moreover, one should be invited to think about the role that we as adults have in the provision and administration of materials, or the lack of them. As Perry Nodelman observes in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* "[t]he more adults successfully manage to keep children's environments free of complexities beyond their current capabilities, the more the children will be prevented from growing and learning." (2003: 98)

Without neglecting the individual cognitive processes that children undergo in the construction of knowledge, Lev Vygotsky's studies in the field of education and in the role of children's socio-affective environment give prominence to the importance that other people have in a child's life (Cameron, 2001). In a few words, and according to Riviere's comments on Vygotsky's contributions to the study of children's psychology (Riviere, 1985), learning does not happen alone, but in direct contact with others in a zone of proximal development –a zone between what children know and can do on their own and what they can learn with the help of and in contact with others. Cognitive development is favoured by the social context, and the people who contribute the most to this process are those who have been and are in direct contact with children: parents, teachers, peers, etc. From this view, a child's intelligence can be measured by what they can do with some 'skilled' help, rather than on their own, which confers greater relevance and responsibility on adults' attitude towards children's capacities. In Nodelman's words "[only] adults who possess the faith that new understanding can be taught can indeed teach it." (2003: 99)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This point becomes essential to what the present research work intends to look into: the role of picturebooks and teachers in the development of critical thinking and visual literacy, in the context of an EFL lesson and in articulation with the schooling language. As it will be later on further developed, the picturebook selected for the experience carried out with young children is not just an illustrated and adapted/simplified story, but an original and rather complex multimodal text, with layers of 'readings' (meanings). Thus, the picturebook, as well as the dynamics of the whole experience -the type of interventions (questions and comments) that the teachers make, the context suggested, etc- were all carefully picked and planned so that the experience proved that it is within children's zone of proximal development that they not only benefited cognitively from their peers' responses, but also from the teachers' help (mediations).

### **1.3.Children, ideology and the possibility of learning**

As discussed in the previous part, it can be the case that once children have reached the final stage of their development, the formal operational stage in Piaget's terminology, some of them still struggle hard with the handling of certain concepts (e.g., abstraction, ambiguity, multiplicity of variables, resolution of problematic situations, etc.). Some children might also find it still difficult to theorise, conceptualise, summarise and empathise with a subject or character. Instead of asking why some students still fail in these areas and in the achievement of more complex mental processes, teachers may sometimes mistakenly tend to simplify the matter by saying that some children just cannot reach such levels of cognitive development, that they lack the critical thinking that is needed or, simply, that they cannot reason things out yet. Now, how much of the ideas and beliefs that adults have about the roles and the way they view children, education and the world do actually control and shape the way adults act upon children, education and the world? In other words, how much of what we do and say in class is, in part, ideological?

Ideology is, as Nodelman points out, "always a matter of politics" (2003: 80). That is, ideology relates to the ways certain segments of society (in this case, adults and, more specifically, teachers) try to get and maintain power over others that, in turn, conform another segment of society. In this case, it is the children that form this other segment. Thus, generalised ideas and assumptions about the way children learn and how much they can or cannot do help teachers define and sustain what, how and how much they teach. That is, our ideas and beliefs about children help adults maintain power over children and control how much they learn and know. The main problem with this is that ideology provides a safe territory –the construction of its own reality, limited by its own boundaries and beyond which it is very difficult to move. Thus, in the field of education, this 'remaining' in a safe territory may lead to undesirable consequences, if this territory is not further explored.

Luckily, ideologies do not always succeed or succeed completely. The moment people think about and question their own beliefs about childhood, for example, they are becoming aware of the ideology (or ideologies) they are part of. Becoming aware of one's own ideology (or ideologies) may give way to resistance to hegemonic discourse(s) and, in so doing, people can gain power over themselves and have a better understanding of others. If people resist common assumptions about teaching and childhood, if they question their ingrained beliefs of how and how much children can learn and do, if they avoid ideology's invitation to common sense, then people (and especially teachers) will decide if what is commonly assumed, believed and accepted are *obviousnesses* or not. In Louis Althusser's words (as Nodelman quotes): "It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it

imposes (without appearing to do so, since this are “obviounesses”) obviousnesses over obviousnesses, which we *cannot fail to recognise* (...)” (2003: 80).

Let us start by analysing how becoming aware of ideology would positively influence the process of reasoning in children. Reasoning, just as thinking, is an ability, a skill that must be developed and exercised. So expecting children that have reached a certain age to be able to engage themselves in critical thinking or analysis without having practised it before is like expecting children to swim without actually teaching them how to swim (how to float, when to breathe, etc.). To resist the *obviousnesses*, adults must think of a way by which they can provide children with appropriate tools that will contribute to their on-going cognitive growth and the development of critical thinking. One way would be by the active encouragement of noticing and seeing from a very early age, as basic skills for the development of critical thinking.

According to Bruner, language is one of the most important tools for cognitive development, and the processes by which adults manage to help children carry out an activity using ‘fine-tuned’ talk is known as scaffolding (Cameron; 2001). This concept brings about paramount implications for both the roles that children and adults play in all learning-teaching processes. As Nodelman’s points out “[p]rovided with a workable scaffolding and treated as responsible individuals (...), children do turn out to be responsible individuals, capable of rich understanding and able to make wise choices.” (2003: 99). So, provided adults believe that Bruner’s socio-constructivist theory of learning is true, children will have the capacity to act upon the reality they encounter and in the contexts they find themselves with the appropriate scaffolding. This statement is also ideological (as it conforms a set of ideas and beliefs that teachers can embrace), but with a more positive interpretation, as it takes the possibility of learning to another level. That is, I personally believe, as a teacher, that with proper scaffolding and the proper tools all children can reach different levels of literacy and critical thinking. And that is the ideology I embraced for the development of the present research work.

#### **1.4. Language teaching and language learning: modern methods, their implications and materials**

Language teaching became into a profession in the twentieth century with the development of applied linguistics (Richards, J. & Rodgers, T.S., 1998). The notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a specific theory of language acquisition and of language learning gave rise to the method concept. Language(s) teaching methods have, in their relatively short professional life, reflected the level and type of proficiency that is required from potential learners. Thus, the development, changes, variations and adaptations of different methodologies along the last century



have been numerous. Within the more communicative approaches to the teaching of languages, I would like to revise two which have special relevance to the present work: the Natural Approach and the Direct Method, both very much suggested and used when teaching young and very young children.

The Natural Approach and the Direct Method are both based on the idea of enabling naturalistic language acquisition in the language classroom. However, they differ in that the Natural Approach puts less emphasis on practice and more on exposure to language input, and on reducing learners' level of anxiety. In the Natural Approach language output is not forced but allowed to emerge spontaneously after students have been exposed to large amounts of comprehensible language input. These two methods have both shaped and influenced the way teachers and students of foreign languages conduct themselves in the classrooms in primary level, together with other teaching approaches which have emerged in the last 50 or so years, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), Content-Based Instruction and Task-Based Language (TBL) Teaching, in consonance with the development of more constructivist theories of learning.

However, if there is something that teachers need to be cautious about is the belief in the overriding power of a method, and that by applying it to the letter will surely guarantee learning on the part of the students. For example, if we take the Natural Approach to the letter, children must first be exposed to large amounts of language (vocabulary, structures and appropriate chunks of discourse) for a reasonable time space in order to take in that language, and before they can engage in more advanced types of language, which may involve, in turn, more advanced types of activities. These last activities (the reading of and work with a picturebook, for instance) could well involve some visual and critical thinking on the part of the students, but these activities would be ruled out because children cannot still handle the language, and with it the abstraction, the reading between the lines or between the images, the play between words and pictures, etc., if abide by strictly defined cognitive and language developmental considerations.

From the considerations above exposed derives a somehow generalised rule that teachers must wait until children have learned enough language of the target language (and also in their schooling language, sometimes) before introducing them to more complex activities and materials (authentic multimodal texts, for example). On the one hand, it is a fact that EFL course books especially designed in levels and age groups can provide appropriate, well-adapted and vast material for both teachers and students to benefit from. Course books (teacher's, student's, resource books and workbooks) make teachers' jobs a lot easier when thinking about and planning their lessons. But, on the other hand, the overuse of these tailored-made resources (especially, simplified readers and audio-visuals) may confine the experience of the student (and, especially, of the child)

to artificial, sometimes stereotyped, materials that not only sell students out, but prevent them from undergoing more authentic, challenging, thought-provoking and enduring experiences<sup>14</sup>.

### **1.5. The role of teachers today: From Freire's educational concepts to the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century education**

The sustained application of one method to the teaching of a foreign language does not guarantee significant learning of the target language. As well as this, the learning of a foreign language without its integration to school life and without its application to life in general could be considered, at least, a questionable subject. Foreign language teachers witness this reality every day in class and probably ask themselves, much as I have, and among others, the following questions: what is the use of teaching children a foreign language in, particularly, certain contexts today (e.g., state primary schools in the City of Buenos Aires)? How much of the language a teacher teaches will students use now and in their near and possible future? Can or will students learn on their own the language they need (or will need) in the future without formal instruction, considering the access they have (and will have) to information today and in the future? (This, if they know how to handle and they still have access to the information, of course.) What is the role of teachers today? And most importantly, a question I ask myself every day: what is and will be left in my students when the class is over, when the school year is over and when they have completed their primary school?

Today's society is characterised for the access it has to all types of information. Therefore, education today must be based on communicative abilities (how to actively and critically participate, communicate and respond in social contexts) and on information processes (how to get, understand, organize, change, question and generate information). This context puts teachers on a seemingly simple but, in reality, more complex and challenging job. From this perspective, teachers should first reflect upon how much of their current practices take into account today's communicative and informative context, and then, how they can (re)orientate their practices towards the development of the communicative abilities and information processes. In other words, teachers should ask themselves what types of tasks and activities they are devising in the contexts they work, so that students are able to go through experiences (both cognitive and affective) that

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<sup>14</sup> My purpose here is not to criticise the use of course books or any other material especially designed for EFL learners and teachers, since they conform the corpus which most teachers (including me) use on a daily basis. On the contrary, my intention is to make a point of the need of starting thinking about the use of other materials (authentic, rich, usually not conceived with a linguistic objective) together with the course books, in order to enrich and enable other experiences to take place, and that can serve as springboards for the development of visual literacy and critical thinking.

help them be better prepared to live the world as it is today and as we can predict it will be in the future. Those students who are able to face a myriad of problem-solving situations today will have the tools to transform their reality in the future.

Education is *praxis*, *reflection* and *action* of the human being upon the world to transform it through the encounter with other people, reminds us Julio Barreiro of Paulo Freire's philosophy of education in his introduction to Freire's book *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad* (Freire, 1969). From this viewpoint, *literacy* is understood as a synonym of *conscience*, and the process of becoming *literate* equals the awakening of the consciences –a change of mentality that implies the understanding and recognition of oneself and one's role in one's own context and reality. Someone who has not freed his or her mind cannot free others', affirms Freire. Therefore, teachers' own *freed* consciences play massive roles in the liberation of today's students' own consciences. As Busto & *et. al.* state in their introduction to *Nuevos Materiales Didácticos en la Formación Docente*, "[In order to move from a transferring and rote-learning education to a comprehensive one, enabling the production of knowledge and the development of abilities, it is necessary (...) to take into account the contributions from the myriad sources that the mass media offers to discuss social, cultural, economic, and political problems (...)]." (2008: 12)<sup>15</sup>.

What Busto & *et. al.* suggest is that, through the introduction, integration and critical use of new materials and resources that the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings to everyday life, teachers must undergo their own conscience-awakening processes to first understand the relevance that these new materials and means of communication have for themselves to then be able to apply and use them in class and, in turn, awake student's consciences. It is through the encouragement of debate and self-reflection, as Busto & *et. al.* put it further on, that the teacher "[...] becomes the didactic administrator of their classroom and can take advantage of the huge possibilities that the incorporation of the new technologies offer (...)]." (2008: 12)<sup>16</sup>.

According to Patricia Huesca Pérez's article *De la Teoría a la Práctica. El marco conceptual del aprendizaje orienta la selección de los materiales didácticos*, which is part of Busto & *et. al.*'s book mentioned above, from the interaction of children's cognitive capacities with today's information and communication tools emerges something called <<cognitive residue>><sup>17</sup>, that is, what is left in students' minds after they have used certain tools to work on a specific

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<sup>15</sup> [My translation]. The original quote is: "Para pasar de una formación transmisiva y memorística a otra comprensiva, productora de conocimientos y formadora de competencias, se requieren (...) los aportes de las diversas fuentes que ofrecen los medios masivos de comunicación para discutir la problemática social, cultural, económica y política (...)."

<sup>16</sup> [Also my translation]. The actual words read: "(...) se convierta en el gestor didáctico de su aula y pueda aprovechar las enormes posibilidades que brinda la incorporación de los avances tecnológicos (...)."

<sup>17</sup> <<residuo cognitivo>> in Spanish

content. This is considered as a new capability (a new cognitive skill) on the part of the students as it relates appropriation-learning modes (of both tools and contents) for the consequent interpretation, analysis, evaluation, etc. processes that are required to get, decode and encode information today.

There exist different communication and information tools according to the type of learning that is fostered. In turn, from the type of learning conception that teachers embrace and take into practice, and whether they are conscious about it or not, will depend the way teachers use these tools. That is, from a behavioural point of view of language teaching and language learning, communication and information tools are used just as a source of information, just as teachers were conceived as the sources of knowledge and content. Whether this way of teaching and of using communication and information tools will allow students to leave class with some <<cognitive residue>> will depend more on the students' own motivations, time-exposure to the tools, and other factors, since students play a receptive-consuming role. Now, if teachers apply a more constructivist approach to the teaching and learning of a language, the interest will be in the processes –the cognitive processes– that the interaction with tools brings about: searching, finding, decoding, comparing, encoding, saving, etc. Becoming aware of these two different approaches of working with students and the communication and information tools in class will have paramount resonance in the type of materials teachers will use and how they will use them.

A parallel between the use of the information and communication tools (i.e., the new technologies) and the use of multimodal texts (e.g., picturebooks) in the classroom can be thought about from a socio-constructivist view, as well. Just as students today can cognitively benefit from the interaction, exploration and use of the new technologies, they could also benefit from the introduction, exploration and use of multimodal texts to complement, further develop and broaden their literacy and thinking experiences. Therefore, the present work is based on the belief that from the active and sustained use of multimodal texts, which open themselves to new forms of reading, seeing and thinking, teachers can orientate their practices towards leaving in their students significant <<cognitive residue>> during, especially, the first years of school and that they can resort to, apply and use in the future. With this premise, I intend to answer some of the questions posed at the beginning of this section and to make clearer the rationale behind this research work.

### **1.6. Teaching material to develop critical thinking and visual literacy**

As stated above, the new information and communication tools call for some new ways of thinking, learning and using the new technologies in class today. This may seem, on the surface, to restrain the use of literature in the everyday lesson, in order to give room to the more communicative tools

and the new sources of information. However, in reality, literature today is still part of the major multimodal world, as a form of interactive text itself (e-books, magazines, picturebooks) or as a referred text (i.e. a text that is talked about/quoted/mentioned in multimodal contexts such web-pages, articles, social networks, etc.) So when asking what possibilities teachers have in the field of literature to successfully integrate it to the new modes of the multimedia class while, at the same time, helping children reach higher levels of literacy and critical thinking, the answer may be quite obvious to the keen eye.

Let us start by exploring the world that surrounds us, our immediate environment, which brings us back to the first part of the theoretical framework I have been trying delineate so far. We live in a highly visual world. Many children of today's generation have been exposed to more images and screens and have seen more moving pictures than any of today's adult generation have in their whole lives. As Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles state in their concise look at the history of *Children's Picturebooks*, "pictorial storytelling can be traced back as far as the earliest paintings on cave walls" (2012: 10), and we seem to be experiencing a new era in the role of visual images and arts. The amount and diverse type of visual exposure that children face today cannot be neglected or overlooked, especially regarding the impact that it has on the field of education, literacy and the role of teachers.

Visual images, signs, pictures, icons, symbols, etc., in their most varied forms to communicate, signify and transmit, are part and parcel of most children's first experiences with literacy –either in the more traditional form of the picturebook or in the more state-of-the-art and interactive forms of screens. Society is full of visual elements, which conform just another way of communication such as spoken and written language is part of our own creation (we do language as human beings and we communicate through language; it is our creation, as well as signs, pictures icons, etc.). However, as Wragg & *et al.* point out "the written and spoken language still play a very significant part. (...) [T]he ability to read well in a variety of contexts, to write clearly and appropriately, and to speak to different individuals and groups, using an appropriate language register, remain vital components of an intelligent society." (1998: 5). So, here we may seem to be in a bit of a dilemma.

If visuals, together with sounds, are the first forms of encounter that children have with literacy, then we need to start thinking about the role that audio-visual materials and pictorial representations have in the classroom, together with the role that teachers and students take in relation to them. I personally believe that, as teachers, we still need to be pointing at literacy as the 'fine-tuned' abilities to read, write, speak and understand aural material, but from a different starting point. That is, why do we not start working with literacy at school with the development of

more, let us say, primeval skills, such as the ability to *read* visuals and to interpret sounds and melodies, for example?

As Kieran Egan states in *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*, the ability to create and read visuals is, after all, one of the ‘primary cognitive tools’ that human beings have. He elaborates upon the importance to allow students space to generate their own mental images and about the fact that images carry more imaginative and memorable force than the concepts alone (2005: 4). Although Egan makes a distinction between external pictures and internal (mental) pictures, all external images are the product of internal representations of concepts. So, for the hitherto purpose, we are more interested in the power of images in general and what they can generate, than whether they are external or internal images.

Now, educating children in the art of visual communication is not an easy job and it implies demanding work with children right from the beginning of formal education, i.e. school and pre-school. Some previous work carried out by Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Style in the field of visual literacy and children, commented on Martin Salisbury’s and Morag Style’s book *Children’s Picturebooks*, explores how picturebooks can be read insightfully by a very young readership audience. When a six-year-old girl was asked to express what made a story a good story, she answered: “A good story’s got to have a problem and the problem’s in the pictures.” (2012: 80). This is by no means a simple answer. It has multiple implications and readings. From the girl’s answer, my own experience as an EFL primary teacher and my readings on the topic, I venture to say that this confirms that not only can some children deal with complex themes, topics, ambiguities, visual complications and abstractions, but that they are also willing to do so, i.e. to be intellectually challenged.

## 2. The Picturebook and the Child

### 2.1. A brief look at the history of Children's Picturebooks.

... the picture book, which appears to be the coziest and most gentle of genres, actually produces the greatest social and aesthetic tensions in the whole field of children's literature.

Sheila Egoff<sup>18</sup>

The picturebook is a relatively new form of literature which is born with the first publication of Randolph Caldecott's work in the late nineteenth century. Caldecott's works, *A Frog he would a- Wooing go* (George Rutledge & Sons, 1883) and *Come Lasses and Lads* (George Rutledge & Sons, 1884) are said to represent the birth of the modern picturebook. In *Children's Picturebooks*, Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles quote Maurice Sendak –one of the most representative artists in the field of visual literature of this time– when trying to explain Caldecott's fine art: "He devised an ingenious juxtaposition of picture and word (...). Words are left out –but the pictures say it. Pictures are left out –but the word says it. In short, it is the invention of the picture book." (2012: 16). That is, in picturebooks words and images become both indispensable and dependent on one other, so that the message can only be conveyed by the clever combination of the two of them, either because images add something that words do not or because images contradict the written text, among other possibilities. This way, readers of picturebooks will have to actively read and *see* to decode the messages and the play that the juxtaposition of images and words allow for. In other words, readers of picturebooks become a very important part in the construction of the meaning(s) of a story.

As said before, picturebooks allow for multiple and different readings, and I dare say they are more about what the readers can make of the story than what the author(s)/artist(s) behind them tried to say or convey<sup>19</sup>. So, if picturebooks are defined by the subtle interplay between words and images and by their particular use of sequential imagery, picturebooks constitute, above all, objects; concrete portable invitations for contemplation, manipulation and exploration with all the senses.

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<sup>18</sup> Sheila Egoff (1918-2005) was an internationally known teacher, librarian, lecturer, author and critic. She was born in Maine (USA) but also lived, studied and worked in California, Toronto and London. She wrote, among other books, *The Republic of Childhood*, the first major scholarly treatment of Canadian children's literature, and *Thursday's Child: Trends and Patterns in Contemporary Children's Literature*.

<sup>19</sup> It is not my intention to say that what the author(s)/artist(s) tried to say or convey is not important or that a story can be interpreted in any way, but that in the specific case of picturebooks the background knowledge, age, culture, etc. of the readership will have a key role in determining the level and number of interpretations that the readership can make of the play of images and words. Therefore, picturebooks are not simply to be read, explained and then retold, but rather to be explored, questioned and reread, maybe another day, the following month or the next year.

As Mo Willems<sup>20</sup> puts it: “A book, being a physical object, engenders a certain respect that zipping electrons cannot. Because you cannot turn a book off, because you have to hold it in your hands, because a book sits there, waiting for you (...)”<sup>21</sup>. And, although usually associated and catalogued for a young and very young readership, a picturebook may well be the perfect gift for anyone, at any time of their lives.

Now, comparing a picturebook with an illustrated story, it is plain to see that the former differs from the latter in its very own conception. In an illustrated story the pictures serve to accompany or clarify the narrative (the written text), so that pictures do not play any role as carriers of meaning by themselves alone –illustrations, generally, do not encode further meaning as they merely serve to decorate the text. Therefore, the illustration works as a supplement to the narrative, an element of decoration. So being the nature of the illustrated story, it only demands that the illustrations be contemplated (admired or simply looked at) by the reader or listener. Opposite to this, the picturebook characterises by, most of the time, the small number of words and the narrative weight of the pictures. The interdependence between text and images makes it impossible to read one without the other, that is, the reading of the text and the reading of the pictures. And this, therefore, makes the development of both literacies –textual and visual literacy– very necessary.

Other aspects that form part of the aesthetics and the concept of the picturebook when trying to define or distinguish it from an illustrated story are the presence of all or some of the following: the lay-out, the texture, the material, the colours, the tone, the font and the print, the size, the arrangement of components, the sequence, the patterns, etc. The presence (or absence) of some of these components defines what a picturebook might look like. But appearances are deceiving and there is no such thing as an identikit for a picturebook, so one must dive into one and explore for oneself if it fits the definition or not, why, and most importantly, if it is worth it and appropriate to share it with children of a certain age. In spite of all the possible doubts or uncertainties that this genre might generate, what can be affirmed is that picturebooks gave way to a relatively new form of literature, a visual literature, that continues to evolve and, as Salisbury and Styles assert in their Introduction to *Children’s Picturebooks*, visual literature “is being stretched and challenged by an increasingly experimental body of ‘makers’ (a suitable term for the artist-author of the picturebook has yet to be found).” (2012: i)

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<sup>20</sup> Mo Willems (b. 1968) is an American writer, animator and creator of many children’s books. He started his career as a writer and animator for *Sesame Street*. Since 2003 he authored numerous books for young children and has been awarded the Caldecott Honor three times. One of his most famous works is one of all children’s favourite picturebook today: *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.picturingbooks.com/miscellany/picture-book-quotes.html> (January 21, 2015)



Among the best and most popular artist-authors of modern picturebooks used in today's English lessons and in our EFL context, one can name Leo Lionni, Maurice Sendak, Eric Carle, Lauren Child and Anthony Browne as the preferred ones. The works vary greatly; from the conception of the stories and the materials and artistic techniques used to create (Lionni's and Carle's are examples of a unique and distinctive confection of their works), to the topics and references to (or intertextuality with) other stories (for example, Browne's usual reference to fairy tales characters or famous works of art). Some have explored (and played) with the very rules of the book itself; from what a book should look like and how it should be read, as in Lauren Child's *Whose Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (Hodder, 2003), to turning it up-side down, as in Lane Smith and Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man* (Viking, 1992). In short, picturebooks can come in all shapes, colours, sizes and textures. They can also be funny, sad, ironic, sweet or bitter-sweet. They can talk about a myriad of topics: love, fears, friendship, family, school, etc. And they can tackle issues such as diversity, discrimination, bullying, loneliness, loss, etc.

## **2.2. Children, the teacher and the use of picturebooks in the classroom**

There exists a vast bibliography about visual literacy and children's picturebooks. However, for the purpose of the present work, it is necessary to refer, at least, to two works that take two different, but equally important, aspects on the subject. One is Evelyn Arizpe's and Morag Styles's research project on children 'reading' picturebooks, found in *Children Reading Pictures: Interpreting Visual Texts* (Routledge Falmer, 2003). The other is Ana Siro's accounts of a series of classroom experiences with teachers, children and picturebooks, published as a research paper within the context of an International Seminar<sup>22</sup>. While the first takes place in England with primary school children with diverse backgrounds, the second takes place in a Spanish language lesson (and in children's presumably mother tongue), in a school in Laferrère, Partido de La Matanza (Province of Buenos Aires) with children of low-income families and impoverished social contexts. Nevertheless, both works show interesting findings regarding children and picturebooks, with Siro's special focus on the role of teachers as *mediators*.

In the case of Arizpe and Styles, they conducted their research on 100 children between the years 1999 and 2001. The picturebooks they examined with the children were Anthony Browne's *Zoo* (Julia McRae, 1992) and *The Tunnel* (Julia McRae, 1989), and Satoshi Kitamura's *Lily Takes a*

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<sup>22</sup> *El Desafío de la Continuidad: una mirada sobre la intervención del mediador en la formación de lectores de álbumes*, Seminario Internacional "La lectura, de lo íntimo a lo público", XXIV Feria Internacional del Libro Infantil y Juvenil, México DF, noviembre de 2004.

*Walk* (Corgi, 1987). The research provided illuminated evidence in children's capacities to draw and talk in response to pictures and picturebooks. These revealed their cognitive, aesthetic and emotional awareness, and made a huge contribution to the understanding of cognitive development and visual literacy.

Arizpe's and Styles's research project proved that children were able to formulate clever and perceptive responses to picturebooks, far beyond what might be expected from them developmentally (according to Piaget's stages), and also that the converse is also true. Some older children made interpretations that were not as complex or elaborate as they would have been expected for their age. So generalizations about children's capacities according to age groups proved not to be always appropriate. The results of Arizpe's and Styles's research show that, as a teacher, one needs to be very cautious about overgeneralisations for the negative implications these can have in children and in education.

As mentioned before, Ana Siro's research revolves around the role of mediators (teachers) for the development of competent picturebooks 'readers' and the importance of sustaining the work with picturebooks throughout schooling (i.e. the continuity of the teacher's work on children's ability to see, notice, appreciate and respond to visual plots and complexities). One of the most salient aspects of Siro's experience is, as well, the sustained work with the same group of children for over three years. Siro's research started with the presentation and reading of Anthony Browne's Spanish version of *Voices in the Park*<sup>23</sup> to a group of third graders. The experience was carried in Spanish, as mentioned before. The children had the particularity that they had not only been familiar with the works of Browne—they had worked with, among others, the Spanish versions of *Gorilla*<sup>24</sup> and *Willy's Paintings*<sup>25</sup>—and his biography, but also with a vast range of artists and their works since preschool and kindergarten<sup>26</sup>.

Siro's work focuses on children's developmental progress in their capacities to identify and interpret the multiple devices that Browne uses in *Voces en el Parque* to convey meaning (different feelings, tones, etc.), to deal with complex subjects, such as the social and existential problems that the characters face, and the handling of the different voices (points of views) in the story. What the research proves is that to learn to read 'difficult' texts, students need a frequent and sustained work with complex texts, with the thoughtful and strategic mediation and scaffolding of the teacher.

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<sup>23</sup> *Voces en el Parque* (México. FCE. 1999)

<sup>24</sup> *Gorilla* (México. FCE. 1991)

<sup>25</sup> *Las Pinturas de Willy* (México. FCE. 2000)

<sup>26</sup> One of the most important pedagogical axis of the institution (Escuela Modelo Albert Einstein) is to follow the works of relevant writers and artists in the history of literature and arts throughout all the formal education of children, starting from preschool and kindergarten.

Thus, the research extends throughout four years working on the same picturebook and with the same group of children.

From Siro's experience derives a detailed account of the children's responses to the teacher/mediator's questions as they read the same book when they were first in third, then in fourth and finally in sixth grade. The responses show that significant cognitive, appreciative and sensitive growth was favoured by the sustained and frequent work carried out with the same group of children and picturebook throughout the years. What children found difficult to grasp the first time they read the story (the identification of the different voices and the synchronicity of events, for example), then they found it very easy the third time, three years later. Moreover, children in sixth grade, for instance, could identify all by themselves Browne's use of Magritte's 'contamination' device in his own story<sup>27</sup>.

To conclude, Ana Siro expresses the necessity of going back to the works of the author-artist several times to understand them more profoundly from the viewer's own perspective, but also from the point of view of the narrator. This can be achieved by the identification of techniques, topics, themes, etc. chosen to tell the story, so that there lies the possibility of opening new questions and other interpretations. Helping children turn themselves into competent readers of picturebooks requires being conscious, as mediators, that the construction of meaning implies several readings and inspections of the same work, as not everything can be seen or understood the first time a picturebook is read. Siro's experience proves that visual-reading competences are both a long-time and a life-time process. As the very 2009-2011 Children's Laureate Anthony Browne once said: "Picturebooks are for everybody at any age, not books to be left behind as we grow older. The best ones leave a tantalising gap between the pictures and the words, a gap that is filled by the reader's imagination, adding so much to the excitement of reading a book."<sup>28</sup>

Taking into account the findings in Arizpe and Style's research project on children's impressions and their grasp of picturebooks, and Siro's contribution to both the importance of a sustained work with children and the role of teachers as mediators when reading picturebooks, the present work, as anticipated at the beginning, aims to examine the role of picturebooks and of teachers in the foreign language lesson and what contributions both of them can make in children's development of visual literacy and critical thinking. The particularity of this experience is its context and the articulation with children's mother tongue or schooling language. Far from being an obstacle and the fact that children were learning their first words in English, Spanish was welcome

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<sup>27</sup> *Contamination* is the name given to a technique that Magritte uses in his works when an object takes or absorbs the quality or consistence of another nearby object.

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.picturingbooks.com/miscellany/picture-book-quotes.html> (21 January 2015)

in the class so that children could make all the comments they wanted and could respond freely. The story (what the written word said) was read out in English accompanied with gestures to favour comprehension, but no extra explanation in Spanish took place. The premise taken was that children would always benefit from the exposure to multimodal texts, independently of the language(s) context. The more instances of exposure children have to picturebooks, the more chances they will have to develop their cognitive and visual skills in general. The more acute the teachers' interventions are, the more chances children will have to think, analyse and make their own interpretations, favouring the exercise of critical thinking.

### **2.3.The use of picturebooks in today's language lesson and its potential for the development of visual literacy**

The study of literature makes literature itself the content or subject of a language course, while the use of literature makes literature one source among many other resources to promote interesting language activities (Lazar, 1993). Thus, literature has always been an important component in both the foreign language (FL) and in the schooling language lesson. However, teachers may well question the value and the advantages of using literature in the language classroom. The answer compels a sequence of bullet points such as: because it is motivating; because it provides authentic material; because it has a general educational value; because it is a stimulus for language acquisition/learning; etc., etc. So literature is generally used to complement the FL lesson (the 'picking' of the language) or the development of literacy in the schooling language lesson.

Thus, literature is most of the time used as a resource to work on different language aspects: to introduce a theme or topic, to enlarge vocabulary, to get more input of a repetitive grammatical structure, etc. When a story is picked up in the FL lesson, for instance, it is mostly done because of its language component (vocabulary, structures, sound patterns and rhythm) or its contribution to the linguistic objectives (to talk about abilities, likes and dislikes, routines, etc.), rather than because of its value and interest as a work of literature/art, or simply for pleasure. In McRae's terms, there is a tendency to still focus on the *referential* aspect of the text rather than on its *representational* dimension. Unfortunately, by doing so, children and teachers miss the opportunity to interact and communicate on another level, that is, on the level of ideas, perceptions, emotions, etc.

However, as Gillian Lazar in *Literature and Language Teaching* puts it: "(...) if we wish to use literature as a resource, then we may not aim to teach 'literary competence'<sup>29</sup> but it is possible

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<sup>29</sup> Literary competence includes numerous skills and sub-skills that readers should develop and master to, roughly speaking, convert words into literary meanings. Literary competence includes the ability to recognise

that our students will begin to acquire it through their exposure to literary texts.” (1993: 14). In other words, if we want our students to start developing some kind of literary competence we need to start by systematically including literature in our class. And, if using literature in class would become a premise for the development of literary competence in students, a parallel can be established if we want our students to develop their visual literacy or visual competence. That is, we must as well start including rich visual materials to work with our students in class.

As anticipated before, the term ‘visual literacy’ has been in use since the 1960s but few have been able to reach a proper definition of it and its implications, as Salisbury and Styles cleverly put it, “verbal language seems to fail us badly in this area” (2012: 56). Yet, in an attempt to find an answer to this difficulty, we may notice that the bibliography distinguishes the skill of *seeing* from the skill of *looking*, as it was pointed out in the **Introduction**. At the same time, the term ‘visual literacy’ has been defined as follows,

The familiar words *literacy* and *numeracy* have more recently been joined by the word *oracy*, but when it comes to describing the skill of seeing (as opposed to looking) we seem to be stuck with the phrase ‘visual literacy,’ which suggests rather the skill of *reading* a pictorial image. One can, of course, see reasons for the coupling of these two words, but the absence of such words as ‘visuacy’ or ‘picturacy,’ (...) still seems significant. The phrase *visual literacy* attests to the dominance of visual culture by the verbal.<sup>30</sup> (Phillpot: 1979)

What is clear is that *seeing* becomes a skill and, as all skills, it needs to be nurtured, learnt and further developed, since, as a ‘refined’ ability it becomes a powerful ability. And this ‘refinement’ of an individual’s skill needs the active help of other people.

Inspecting what pictures –whether they belong to the artistic, commercial or entertainment field– provoke on the viewers gives teachers insight into how *visual literature* can be used in an educational context to take it to another level. If, as McRae says, it is necessary to hint at a more representational use of literature in the classroom in order to involve students, stimulate their minds and their imagination, and to develop their literary competences, then what better resource than the use of picturebooks for young learners. By now, there should be no doubt in asserting that picturebooks are one of the most suitable portable concrete objects (which need no download or further equipment to run) capable of demanding from their readers and viewers a deep aesthetical experience, the application of their visual skills and some thorough critical thinking.

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and decode figures of speech, narrative and poetic devices, literary trends and genres, etc. It also includes the ability to interpret and respond to texts.

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from: <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professionaldevelopment/childlit/illustration502.html> (21 January 2015)

### 3. Research work

#### 3.1. Context, children's backgrounds and school general characteristics

The research work took place in a primary double-shift state school (Escuela N° 2/ Distrito Escolar: 8) in the neighbourhood of Parque Chacabuco, in the City of Buenos Aires. Some of the children that attend this school reside in impoverished urban settlements nearby (mostly Barrio Rivadavia, Barrio Illia or Villa 1-11-14). Many of them come from low-income families and some of them belong to the first or second generation of immigrants coming from neighbouring countries (mostly Peru and Bolivia, and, in less degree, Paraguay). Children's parents could be said to belong to the low working-class community; some of them have informal or intermittent jobs (sewers, building workers, drivers, etc.) and some of them are directly jobless. Families have, in general, a relatively poor formal education<sup>31</sup>. Regarding first-form children's previous schooling, they come, in turn, from different pre-schools, where they have had different experiences with literacy, arts and other content areas.

The school, named *Tomás Santa Coloma* is a small institution. It has only got seven sections (that is, seven grades) and around 20 children in each grade. One of the many pedagogical aspects that the school aims at is, among others, a strong development of literacy in the students, especially by the promotion of multiple reading and writing activities that are carried out during the year. For this, the librarian teacher develops whole-year project-works, along with other teachers from other areas, but especially with the home-room teacher, so that children have a frequent contact with the library and its books. The library is also available for children to visit it during the post-meal period time (around 45 minutes every day). Some days, a selection of books is displayed on round tables and children are encouraged to thumb through them and take them home on a loan, if they want. Other days, a selection of board games (chess, draughts, dominoes, etc.) is displayed instead, or a movie is projected in the library.

Regarding books and picturebooks, the school derived during the years 2013-2014 a significant budget (from the parents' fundraising association) to the purchase of brand new books and picturebooks for all ages to renew the library's old catalogue. The librarian teacher, named Ruth Myriam Ortuño, is as well an experienced home-room teacher with over 16 years of

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<sup>31</sup> To give one example, especially related to the topic of this paper, there was a case of a group of brothers, one of them in first form, whose mother was partly illiterate (she was not able to read the communication notes) and teachers needed to develop other means to contact parents, since the traditional communication means (cuaderno de comunicaciones) was not adequate. This example is extremely pertinent because this situation challenges the school and the teaching community to re-visit and re-think their common social practices and assumptions.

professional development and became a librarian in 2004. She has specialised in children's books, picturebooks and has worked along with Ana Siro on projects regarding the development of literacy in the first cycle<sup>32</sup>.

As the school has its double-shift modality, but it is not intensified in foreign languages or any other area in particular, children from first to seven form have a total amount of five periods of English per week. Children attend school from 8.20 in the morning to 16.20 in the afternoon. They have around one period (45 min) to have lunch and another period (45 min) after it, called "post-comedor", as a break (they can rest, play outside on the playground, play with board games, read or watch a film in the library, etc. depending on the day, as clarified before). Children eat at around 12.15 in the afternoon and go back to lessons at 13.45. In the case of 1<sup>st</sup> form, their five English periods are distributed as it follows:

- last period on Monday afternoon (15.25 – 16.10)
- first period on Tuesday afternoon (13.45 – 14.30)
- last period on Wednesday morning (11.30 - 12.45)
- last two periods on Friday afternoon (14.30 – 16.10)

This time-schedule has, in turn, the following disadvantages; most of the periods are in the afternoon, which is the time when children are the most tired and become restless; most of the commemorative events ("actos escolares") or outings take place in the afternoon, so lessons are at least once a month cut short or taken over by these events<sup>33</sup>; some parents, due to different personal reasons, need to fetch children earlier before school finishes, so many pupils miss the last part of the lesson or leave without finishing their tasks, as well. In brief, the exposure, work and experience that children actually have with the foreign language is shorter than the devised according to the annual plans and the calendar. The schedule also shows the position that the FL teaching has at school since subjects in Spanish considered core subjects, such as Mathematics, Social & Natural science and Spanish language (or "Prácticas del Lenguaje"), have a position of privilege and FL learning gets some of the least favoured teaching blocks in the timetable.

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<sup>32</sup> She formed part of the Project "Centro de Lectores" carried out in some schools belonging to the modality "Plurilingüe" in CABA, for example in Lugano (School N°6/DE: 21), where Ana Siro worked as a coordinator of the project.

<sup>33</sup> It is not my intention to imply that I am against these events; commemorative events and outings are not only necessary, but they can also be immensely educational, recreational, gratifying and rewarding. In fact, I have enthusiastically participated in many of them (Teacher's Day, Book Fair, Science Fair, etc.) with my group of pupils in English and with the school in general. What I intend to show is that, although the amount of time that is assigned for the teaching of a foreign language seems quite interesting, in reality it is always less than the considered when designing the annual plans.

### **3.2.Group's general characteristics and some previous experiences with an illustrated story and a picturebook**

The group of children selected for the research (first formers) has the particularity of having some hardships with literacy and numeracy, according to the home-room teacher's and librarian's observations. In their view, this might be due to poor stimulation during their pre-school years and at home. By the middle of the school year (June of 2014), many were still struggling with numbers, concepts of quantity and with the recognition of letters and their phonemic association. Teachers expressed, as well, some worry about the quality of certain children's responses to visual and oral exposure. For example, after watching a video or being read a story, teachers observed that children had seemingly found it hard to follow the plot or understand a process in a story or a sequence of images. Teachers felt pupils found it especially hard to make connections or associations and that that they had to tell or explain what was happening in a story, for example. Otherwise, children made up their own logical deductions, associations or conclusions, according to the teachers<sup>34</sup>.

In my view, children may have seemed a bit behind regarding what they were formally expected to recognise and produce in Spanish<sup>35</sup>, but as far as English learning was concerned, they seemed to be a very responding group, capable of doing most of the tasks they were asked to do. Although it is a fact that most of these tasks demanded only aural recognition and oral production from the pupils in English, most of them were able to successfully solve any exercise that involved logical sequences or deductions. They were able to follow and understand instructions, to put in order and to categorise. Generally speaking, children could solve most problems that required the use of cognitive skills. Consequently, I venture to say, it should have been the same in their Spanish and other special areas lessons.

Regarding the kind of responses that children gave to certain types of stimuli, I had personally worked with stories and picturebooks before starting this research paper and I did not perceive any special difficulty in the comprehension of these texts and visual inputs. On the contrary, I was surprised by the level of attention coming from the pupils as stories were told, which I think it could be due to children's natural attraction to visuals and stories and also to the lack of

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<sup>34</sup> This is, at least, a very questionable observation on the part of the teachers, since using one's imagination is one way of putting our thinking skills into practice, especially when a story challenges us beyond our immediate possibilities. Maybe, what teachers could have asked from children was the reason behind their statements or ideas (what elements in the story made them think one way or another), so that, in this way, they could elaborate answers, explain themselves and do some further thinking that supported their conclusions or allowed them to see other possibilities. This would have taken the experience to another level, to the level of critical thinking, which is what this paper intends to examine and put into practice.

<sup>35</sup> What was especially observable for me was that many students had diction difficulties, especially one who was very hard to understand, but not cognitive ones.



exposure and access that they had had to these texts and materials during the pre-school years or at home. Children wanted to hold, keep and manipulate the books I brought, asked if they were mine or if they belonged to the library, and if I let them take the books home. To better illustrate my personal impression of the group I will briefly describe some previous work carried out with these children at the beginning of the year with first an illustrated story and then with a picturebook.

At the beginning of the year, I told this group of children a traditional version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Penguin Young Readers Level 1) with the support of its visuals (illustrations) and they were able to follow and help me re-tell the story several times afterwards. As it was the first story I used and worked with these children, I only focused on certain aspects of the story (characters, vocabulary and the sequence of events). As a final activity, children were asked to draw and comment to the teacher what happened to Goldilocks in the end, since the traditional story is very intriguing about Goldilocks's whereabouts: Who is this girl? What does she do in the middle of the woods alone? Where does she go after being stormed out of the Bears' house? As Bruno Bettlheim puts it in his book *Psicoanálisis de los Cuentos de Hadas*,

[This story lacks some of the most important characteristics of the true fairy tales: in the end there is no improvement or relief; there is no conflict resolution and, therefore, there is no happy ending. However, it is a tale full of meaning, because, symbolically, it makes reference to the most excruciating problems of the child's development: the struggle against oedipal conflicts, the search for identity and the fraternal rivalry.] (1991: 3001)<sup>36</sup>

So, to the question 'what happens to Goldilocks after she storms out of the Bears' house?', for example, children's imaginative responses ran from the protagonist being chased by a dog, a wolf, a tiger, a bear or the three bears in the story, to Goldilocks being chased by a monster and bumping into a tree, or going into a cave and being attacked by a cat and bugs. One of the kids even said that Goldilocks met a fairy and a skunk, and the skunk ate her up.

These children's responses at the beginning of the year proved that they were not only capable of following and understanding a story, identifying the characters and what happened to them, but also that they were very imaginative, resorting probably to their schemata of fairy tales (e.g. the fact that Goldilocks is being chased by a wolf, a popular animal-character in tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* or *The Three Little Pigs*), and that they were able to narrate orally and through their drawings what they imagined or thought. So, their drawings revealed, as well, how their imagination and thoughts were shaped and conditioned by other stories, cartoons, children's

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<sup>36</sup> [My translation]. The original words are: "Esta historia carece de alguna de las características más importantes de los verdaderos cuentos de hadas: al final no hay mejoría ni alivio; no hay resolución de conflicto alguno y, por lo tanto, no hay final feliz. Sin embargo, es un cuento lleno de significado, porque, simbólicamente, hace referencia a los problemas más acuciantes del desarrollo del niño: la lucha contra los conflictos edípicos, la búsqueda de la identidad y la rivalidad fraterna."

films, etc. that build up their socio-cultural environment, and this reveals, in turn, the importance that exposure to a variety of literary-visual materials has in children, so that they can draw from it to elaborate their own thoughts and narratives.

In another opportunity, close to the series of lessons on *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, I decided to work with my adapted version of the picturebook *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (Harper Collins, 1995) by Leo Lionni in the library. In this version, little blue and little yellow are well-defined geometrical figures (circles), as well as his parents and friends (other well-defined shapes). The main objective of working with this story was to introduce students to some basic geometrical figures (circle, square and triangle) and colours (blue, yellow and green), while enjoying a story about friendship, difference and acceptance<sup>37</sup>. When the cover of the book was presented to students (a blue circle and a yellow circle that merge a little to show their intersection as green), they were encouraged to describe what they saw. Some said they were two circles, two balloons or two balls, but one of them (Carlos) said that the yellow circle was Goldilocks: “Es Ricitos de Oro”. When the teacher asked why, Carlos said: “porque es amarillo como el pelo de Ricitos”.

Although the librarian found Carlos’s response a bit peculiar, probably because she did not know how much the group had worked with the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* before, Carlos’s answer was more than valid and worth-examining, since he was both activating previous knowledge to make connections with new present data and trying to make sense (find meaning) and interpret something which was extremely abstract for him. In fact, the association that the child made was not arbitrary or disconnected at all; he was being able to justify his answer which belonged to the same area of experience, that of stories and fairy tales. Moreover, the connection could be said to be even meta-literary: between stories. And if we think about, specifically, the critical thinking skills, Carlos was resorting to associative skills, so necessary for today’s any job, work or task.

The brief anecdote mentioned above also makes us teachers reflect upon children’s answers, censorship and the power we sometimes exercise on our pupils by conditioning their responses. Many times we find ourselves puzzled by children’s interpretations and answers, and because it is

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<sup>37</sup> Although *Little Blue and Little Yellow* is a book commercially catalogued for toddlers (three to six year olds), and this is proved by the fact that in countries such as in the USA it is in the under-six year old children section and its edition only comes in boards (“cartoné” in Spanish) for a better manipulation for kids, the level of abstraction that the story and the visuals require from any reader (whatever their age) leaves them (kids and adults) at least puzzled. The simplicity in the concrete confection of the book (irregular torn shapes of different colours accompanied but a few words per sentence) is indirectly proportional to the depth of the plot and construction of characters, demanding from the readers’ considerable thinking about the work as a unit. From the vast picturebooks I have examined there are very few which have such abstract shapes as characters.

us who cannot see or understand their connections, or simply because we do not receive the expected response, we tend to ignore them or, worse, rule them out. In fact, what I sometimes observe is a lack of real interest in what children think or have to say about a topic, problem, situation, etc. So, instead of teachers encouraging children to develop their ideas further and to justify what they think and say, they may tend to (most of the time unintentionally) underestimate or even decline/censor pupils' reactions and responses<sup>38</sup>. This has a tremendous impact on a group's level of participation and response to certain topics or when asked pupils to give their personal opinion or elaborate arguments about something. The more we censor our children, the less they will venture to think and express for themselves.

But this is, as well, hard job on the part of teachers, since we are the ones who must first recognise, allow, accept and know how to deal with plurality, ambiguity, contradictions and even our own ignorance. Sometimes, it is children that give teachers the task of looking in a different way, and it is our responsibility to take the challenge and force ourselves to *see* with different eyes. And this is the only way that a real 'dialogue' between teachers and students can be established and evolve into significant learning. In Freire's vision, real education can no longer be the encounter of someone who educates with someone who is being educated, but the encounter of someone who educates at the same time that is being educated with someone else who is being educated at the same time that educates<sup>39</sup>. In short, no teacher who is not yet prepared to learn from their students and engage in an honest and meaningful dialogue with them will probably ever reach their students or transmit anything that they will keep, remember or use in their future lives.

### 3.3. Selection of the picturebook: which and why.

*Children will tolerate ambiguities, peculiarities, and things illogical; will take them into their unconscious and deal with them as best as they can. The artist has to be a little bit bewildering and a little bit disorderly...*

Maurice Sendak<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This reminds me of Alvarado's and Guido's first lines of the Prologue to their compilation book about the socio-historical construction of childhood and its multiple images called *Incluso los niños. Apuntes para una Estética de la Infancia*, and which read as follows: "La infancia es una pesadilla que la modernidad ha construido pacientemente. La lógica de la planificación no admite los espacios en blanco: si el futuro de la raza está en ese niño despreocupado y ajeno, se debe entonces poner el ojo sobre él, tener cuidado de no perderlo de vista: preparar con esmero el molde del adulto por venir." (1993: 5).

<sup>39</sup> As Julio Barreiro puts it in his prologue to Paulo Freire's 15<sup>th</sup> edition of *La Educación como Práctica de la Libertad*, "(...) ya no cabe más la distinción entre el educando y el educador. No más educando, no más educador, sino *educador-educando* con *educando-educador* (...)." (1974: 16)

<sup>40</sup> Maurice B. Sendak (1928-2012) was an American illustrator and writer of children's books. He became widely known for his book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), adapted different media several times. For this masterpiece he won the annual Caldecott Medal from the Children's Librarians in 1964, recognising the book as the 1963 most distinguished American picturebook for children. Since then, the book has been voted

Considering that children had worked and were by then familiar with the classic story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, it seemed appropriate and interesting to exploit this background knowledge (schemata) further. Therefore, children were introduced to a picturebook that, although based on the story of Goldilocks, had a plot and tone on its own. As introduced before, the picturebook selected for this research work was Anthony Browne's *Me and You* (Picture Corgi, 2011). In this case, Browne not only rewrites the traditional story but also takes a new look on it by the use of several devices. First, in each recto of the book (the right-hand page) a small bear goes for a stroll in the park with his parents, leaving their bowls of porridge to cool down, as it is expected. However, on each verso (the left-hand page) there is the story of a red-haired girl, who on an outing with, presumably, her mother<sup>41</sup>, gets lost after chasing a balloon.

So, Browne's new version of Goldilocks deviates while, at the same time, adds new elements, meaning and depth to the simple story of the naughty girl who ends learning what the consequences of her trespassing. In *Me and You*, on the other hand, a rather red-haired girl gets lost in a frightening, desolated and grey city after a balloon calls her attention. She decides then to follow it and get hold of it. Suddenly, the girl realises she has lost her way. She looks desperate and afraid but keeps on walking until she reaches a more open and leafy area in the city and finds the Bears' house. The Bears' house stands out from the rest of the houses and frames in the story as it is colourful (bright yellow) and has its door invitingly open. Inside the girl goes over the three bowls, the three chairs and the three beds, as expected, but without any comments or words that accompany what the classic story would say. The events are only narrated by a sequence of small frames or pictures, as if they were photographic takes.

At the same time that the story of the girl unfolds, on each recto of each double page the reader can follow The Bear Family's plot. The Bears have decided to go for a walk in a park that is near their house to make time for their porridge to cool down. Papa Bear talks about his work and his car and Mama Bear talks about her work and the house, as Baby Bear messes about along the way. When the Bears are back home, they proceed as the classic story would go, although it is Mama Bear who goes up the stairs first to see who is there. Once the girl is found in the Baby Bear's bed and heavily scolded by The Bears Family, the story focuses on what happens to the girl afterwards. So, after running out of the Bears' house, the girl storms out into the streets. Rain and

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favourite picturebook of all time by the School Library Journal readers in many occasions. Internationally, Sendak received the third biennial Hans Christian Andersen Award for illustration in 1970 for his lasting contribution to children's literature.

<sup>41</sup> We are never sure if the woman is the girl's actual mother or not; she could be an older sister, an aunt, a friend, or even a man, her father, big brother, etc. However, the first impression that we get (and that children got, unanimously) is that she is "her mother".

hail start falling down but she keeps on walking, hands in pockets, head down and covered with the hood of her sweatshirt, until she sees her mum at a distance. A strong bright light appears. Again, it is a small sequence of frames that narrates this part of the story. The girl runs to her mother, her head uncovers and her long red hair blows. She embraces her, supposedly, 'mother' tightly. By the end of the story, the girl's plot has taken the last two pages (a complete double page). And that is, in brief, what the story is about.

*Me and You* has not only all the characteristics of the modern picturebook (the juxtaposition of pictures and words, the use of visual metaphor, layers of meanings to be uncovered by several readings and looks, etc.), but it also touches and cleverly interweaves topics and themes related to the contemporary world children live in and how these affect their everyday life experiences. Browne poses an interesting view on social class and stereotype depictions: a working-class upbringing versus a middle-class living, a grey industrial environment versus a light-coloured urban setting, a single-parent family versus a traditional three-membered family, loneliness, worry and fear versus accompaniment, unconcern and happiness, hostility and danger versus safety. But there are also some interesting commonalities in both plots: Baby Bear and girl are both rather alone, in the sense that they do not seem to have, at least at that time/moment, other friends to play with, and this situation brings them together in terms of feelings, for example.

### **3.4. Experience, objectives and didactic sequence**

As anticipated before, the experience consisted of the guided and sustained work of Anthony Browne's picturebook *Me and You* with a group of children (1<sup>st</sup> formers) and with the EFL and Librarian Teachers as mediators in the library. The main objective was to have a detailed account of children's oral production in response to different aspects of the picturebook selected. The emphasis would be put on children's own capacities to follow the narration of the two stories (the Baby bear's and the girl's), to distinguish what is 'said' from what is 'shown', and their present ability to appreciate and reflect upon the different devices that Browne uses in his story to convey meaning, feelings, tone, etc. (that is, colours, sequence, size and distribution of images). It will be argued how with appropriate guidance on the part of the teachers, children's capacities of interpretation and appreciation of the story and its particularities can be further stretched favouring the development of children's visual literacy and critical thinking.

Thus, the experience consisted of, first, the planning of a didactic sequence that would take into account the instruments and the procedures that served best to collect the data that would then be used for the analysis and conclusions of this work. The didactic sequence consisted, in turn, of three moments, and to have a better register of students' responses, reactions and interventions

during the experience it was decided that the Librarian Teacher would film the experiences with a camera, as she would sit at a back-side angle with respect to the group of children. The didactic sequence was thought as the following:

**a. First moment:**

At the beginning of the year the EFL Teacher narrates a traditional and adapted illustrated story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears in English (Penguin Young Readers Level 1). The Teacher refers to the illustrations of the story to support the narration and convey meaning. Teacher and children work with the characters (Papa bear, Mama bear, Baby bear and Goldilocks; how many bears and how many girls there are in the story, etc.), the vocabulary (bowls, chairs and beds; how many there are, etc.), the sequence of events (the repetition of procedures with small variations and formulaic language<sup>42</sup>) and the end (what happens to Goldilocks in the end; where she goes, etc.). Children illustrate and narrate orally (in Spanish) their thoughts. Teacher takes down notes about it.

**b. Second moment:**

By the middle of June, the teacher presents the picturebook *Me and You* and works with the cover. She asks students to describe what they see and to think what the story can be about, and why. She would not anticipate that it is another version of Goldilocks. The teacher would narrate the story as she shows and points to the pictures. Once children have established some parallel with the story of Goldilocks, teacher would work on the vocabulary and structure of the story with guiding questions to encourage students to justify their thoughts and impressions.

Possible questions:

- Is this the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears? Why (not)?
- What is different from the story you know?
- Where do the bears live? Where does the girl live?
- What do we know about the girl?
- How does she get lost?
- How does this story end?

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Goldilocks enters the house, tries papa's porridge and says "This porridge is too hot". Then Goldilocks tries mama's porridge and says "This Porridge is too cold". Finally, Goldilocks tries baby's porridge: "This porridge is just perfect", and she eats it all. Goldilocks sits on papa's chair and says "This chair is too hard", etc, etc.

### c. Third moment:

In the following lesson, the teacher would show and retell the story, but this time focusing more on the pictures, the cover and the endpapers included. Questions would be guided towards the work on the different devices used to narrate the two stories and convey meaning and feelings, favouring children a greater appreciation of the small details in the pictures, and of the sequence of events, distribution and colour of the images. Going back to the previous lesson's questions and work on the story, the teacher would further ask:

- Where can we follow the girl's story? On the recto (right-hand) or verso (left-hand) of the page? (Probably, Teacher would here point to the right or left page, so that children do the same to answer)
- What colour are these images/pictures (if compared with the bears' images/pictures)? Why?
- How do these colours make you feel?
- Is there a connection/relation between these colours and how the girl feels?
- What happens in the end with the colours?

As children are learning their first words in English and have had, so far, a relatively short contact with the foreign language, the accounts of the experiences that follow this section are faithful to the way they were carried out. That is, although the story was told (read aloud) in English, children were allowed to intervene as much as they wanted and needed in Spanish. The EFL teacher used Spanish to ask questions or help the children grasp the meaning when the language in English was too complex. As well, children were welcome to answer in Spanish.

The 'excessive' use of Spanish in the English lesson could be, at first sight, controversial, since the schooling language or the mother tongue has always been seen as an interferer (something to be avoided) in the foreign language class. However, this work considers exactly the opposite: the schooling language or the mother tongue must be the way through which students can communicate, since it is the only (or main) language that they have to express themselves, especially in low levels. If these languages are forbidden (not to mention punished) then, what is condemned is the very act of free expression. I personally think that the use of foreign language must be encouraged and fostered, but only according to the context; for example, when teaching instructions, formulaic language, routines, reading a story, playing a game, etc., but not when discussing a book or giving an opinion, for example, if children still lack the language to do so.

I also think, as García M. L. & Macías M. (ISPEI Sara C. de Eccleston) affirm in their introduction to the paper *Literatura Infantil de la Tradición Inglesa en el Profesorado de Educación*

*Inicial*<sup>43</sup>, that if “[teaching English as a foreign language in kindergarten level allows children under six to learn new linguistic competences and start building up their own socio-cultural universe]”<sup>44</sup>, this premise must be continued during primary school. This way, literature in English would stop being solely a source to the learning of other contents and would start being a content in itself. If literature is in English, then the language should become just an anecdote. That is, if teachers decide to use literature and this comes in English, all the better to foster aural and cultural awareness, while fostering the imagination and the development of speaking and other cognitive skills. In other words, in my view and for the hitherto purpose, it is not so much what language children use, but what emotions and thinking mechanisms are triggered when reading, hearing and seeing literature.

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<sup>43</sup> This paper was presented in the IV Simposio de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil del Mercosur, taken place at Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Univesidad de Buenos Aires, on November 27, 28 and 29, 2014

<sup>44</sup> [My translation]. The original sentence reads like this: “Enseñar la lengua extranjera inglés en el nivel inicial les brinda la posibilidad a los niños y niñas menores de 6 años de adquirir nuevas competencias lingüísticas y comenzar a construir el propio universo sociocultural.”



## 4. Experiences and observations

### 4.1 First presentation and reading

The EFL Teacher (T) tells students they are going to the library to read a book. T sits on a chair at the back of the library and children sit on the floor facing her. The Librarian Teacher (LT) sits aside, also on a chair, to record the experience with a camera. T presents (shows children) the cover, and the backcover of the picturebook, and then both of them at the same time as a double spread. T does not say anything as children watch in silence. The cover consists of four differentiated pictures. The one that covers most of the space is a portrait-like picture of The Bear Family taken in the park<sup>45</sup>. The three other pictures at the bottom consist of a sequence of actions about a girl. In the first small picture the girl is eating from a bowl of food. In the second, she is sitting on a chair (while breaking it). And in the third, she is sleeping in a big bed (see all scanned pictures of the book in the appendix section).

T reads and points to the title of the story at the top, as she invites children to have a proper look at the images, but without asking them what the story could be about. T remains silent. However, one child, Beymar, is eager to describe: “Se comió la comida del bebé, se sentó en la silla del bebé y se durmió en la cama del bebé.”<sup>46</sup> Another child, Miguel, continues: “Estaba comiendo la sopa calentita, y se rompió la silla, y luego se fue a dormir en la cama suave.” As T shows the first double spread endpapers of the picturebook, Beymar intervenes again: “color celeste y color dorado”. T thanks and acknowledges Beymar’s contribution but does not add any verbal response. She then shows the first page which consists of the presentation of the bears’ house and that reads

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<sup>45</sup> As Claudia Cadenazzo (ALIJA) points out in her paper *La Cultura Visual y los Libros-Album* (IV Simposio de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil del Mercosur), this portrait-like picture of the family reminds us of the classic photographs or portraits of families. The father stands generally at the centre (usually bigger and taller than the mother and the rest of the members of the family). One hand is in his pocket and the other on his wife’s shoulder. This position of the hands connotes safety and wealth –the man as the guardian and supporter of the family. The mother, being smaller and shorter, stands between the father and the child, with her hands at the back. Her closeness to the child (certainly closer than the father) transmits affection, contention and motherhood observance. These details reveal a lot about social and cultural codes ingrained in society and transmitted in pictures. However, Browne specializes in “breaking” those codes and stereotypes in different ways, for example, distorting the shade that projects from The Bears family. This shade has a rectangular or square shape that does not coincide with the shape of the family. Also, the detail of the small human-like figure walking at the very far back forms part of the family picture, like an intruder.

<sup>46</sup> Children’s comments and responses are transcribed in Spanish (the language they used) and remain faithful to the exact words and the word-order they used to express.

*This is our house.* One of the children, Emiliano, intervenes: “Es la casa número 3”. T asks him how he knows, and the child says that he can see a number 3 on one of the pillars of the house<sup>47</sup>.

T presents the first double spread, and Luciano says: “Es una familia de osos”, pointing to the right-hand page. As T points to the sequence of pictures on the left-hand, many children (Facundo, Maia) say “humanos”. As T points to the following sequence of pictures (the girl’s story on the left-hand page of the second double spread), Beymar describes each picture: “Un globo, vio el globo, se estaba yendo el globo, se fue con el globo, se fue a esa casa y le daba miedo.” At one point, Miguel says: “Se asustó”, to what the teacher replies: “No sé, no dice nada de eso. ¿Ven ustedes alguna palabra? ¿Hay palabras acá?” pointing to the sequence of pictures on the left-hand page. Children shake their heads and answer negatively. Then, Antonela, pointing to the next page, exclaims: “Ahí sí.” So teacher reads out: “One morning Mummy made porridge (...)”.

On the third double spread, as T points to the sequence on the left-hand page, Beymar continues: “Entró ahí,” as Luciano anticipates: “¡Encontró la casa! ¡Encontró la casa de los osos!” On the fourth double spread, Beymar, resumes: “Tomó su desayuno de papá, tomó su desayuno de mamá, y tomó su desayuno del bebé...” and then, Luciano asks: “¿Eso es una nena?”<sup>48</sup> Teacher echoes Luciano’s question to the rest: “No sé, ¿es una nena?”, and many children respond (Emiliano, Carlos): “Es Ricitos de Oro.” Teacher does not assert or deny, she just says: “Let’s see...” and keeps on reading.<sup>49</sup> On the fifth double-spread, Beymar, goes on with his ‘reading aloud’: “La silla de papá, la silla de mama, la silla del bebé... ¡la rompió!” Antonela complains: “¡Ay Beymar, estás contando toda la historia!” At this time, Beymar anticipates that the bears will get angry because somebody ate their food. Teacher says that they still do not know that.

On the sixth and seventh double spread, Beymar keeps on: “entró ahí, entró ahí y se bajó de la escalera, va a la cama del papa, va a la cama de la mama, a la del bebé.” And as T reads what it

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<sup>47</sup> T will to go back to this on the second presentation and reading of the story to ask why it is number 3, and not 4 or 5, for example (what is the relation between the number and who lives there?). As well as this, teacher will ask what other things or salient elements they can see.

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to mention that Luciano was usually addressed as a girl by people who did not know him (for example, in outings), since he had long curly fair hair and used it loose. Only by the end of the school year he had his hair cut short. This poses some questions about how Luciano saw the girl/boy, and how conventions shape people’s way of seeing and ‘reading’

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Browne’s drawing of “Goldilocks” differs greatly from the stereotypical depiction of the blond curly-haired and blue-eyed little girl, wearing a pastel colour dress and shoes. Browne’s character is a red-haired girl, who wears glasses and dark clothes (a gray pair of trousers/jeans, black shoes and a black jumper with a hood that she puts on when walking in the streets). This look does not fit the stereotypical girl’s look from fairy tales, as noticed before, and her plainness and sobriety may make students doubt about her gender. I venture to say that this less “feminine” character serves for both male and female identification with the story and helps children break with stereotypes.

says on the right-hand page (*'Someone's been sitting on MY chair!' said Mummy*), Luciano observes from one of the pictures: “¡Los almohadones están en el suelo!” pointing to mummy’s chair. By the eighth double spread, other children start telling what they see and think: “se durmió media hora”, Facundo says, pointing to the picture of the girl sleeping on the baby’s bed<sup>50</sup>. Another child says: “Se van arriba”, in reference to the bears on the opposite page. T asks who goes up the stairs first and children say it is daddy and then the little one although, in reality, it is mummy bear<sup>51</sup>.

On the ninth double-spread, Beymar observes: “La encontraron en la cama y se enojaron”. Antonela asks if she can see mummy’s face<sup>52</sup>. On the tenth double spread, Beymar, goes on: “...y estaba allí y abrió la puerta y se fue para abajo y se escapó y era de noche, y se fue.” T asks children what happened to her. They say that she got scared. On the eleventh and last double spread, Beymar tries to finish his ‘telling’: “se fue, y...” Luciano interrupts him: “¡Su mamá! Corrió”. Finally, the teacher shows the endpapers and children announce (Antonela, Bianca): “¡fin!”<sup>53</sup>

After this first ‘reading’ of the story, the English Teacher (T), the Librarian Teacher (LT) and the children (CH) engage in the following conversation about the story:

T: Yo estoy un poco confundida, ¿conocían esta historia?

Emilano: Sí. Era Ricitos de Oro.

T: ¿Y dice en algún lugar que es Ricitos de Oro?

(T thumbs the pages of the book)

CH: No.

T: ¿Cómo se llamaba la historia?

Antonela: Yo y vos.

T: *Me and You*. Entonces, es una historia parecida a la de Ricitos de Oro... ¿En qué es parecida?

Emiliano: Tres osos y una nena.

T: ¿Y qué más?

Carlos: La comida, la cama....

(...)

T: ¿Y en qué son diferentes las historias?

<sup>50</sup> This is the first time that there is only one picture on the left-hand page which covers the whole page. At this point the story is about to reach its climax, at least, in its classical version.

<sup>51</sup> T will go back to this detail again next time.

<sup>52</sup> It is at this point that the two stories converge in place and time: the bears meet the girl and the girl meets the bears. This double point of view is displayed on opposite pages. Because of this, T will ask children on a second reading who is looking at whom.

<sup>53</sup> T will ask on the second reading what those endpapers are for.

Ezequiel: Los osos tienen diferente ropa.

T: ¿Y qué más? ¿Dónde viven los osos?

Maia: En una casa.

T: En una casa... ¿en el bosque?

CH: Sí/No.

T: ¿En el bosque?

Miguel: En la jungla.

T: ¿En la jungla? Estos osos (pointing to them on the cover), ¿dónde viven?

Emiliano: No. En la ciudad.

T: Tengo otra pregunta, ¿cómo llega la nena a la casa de los osos?

Luciano: Caminando.

T: Caminando... y ¿por qué?

Carlos: Porque se perdió de su mamá, porque persiguió el globo.

Luna: Y hay otra diferencia en la historia. En la historia que nos contaste no hay mamá<sup>54</sup>.

Carlos: Y el papá oso y la mamá osa no tenían trabajo<sup>55</sup>.

(...)

T: ¿Y cómo termina esta historia?

Facundo: En la misma página<sup>56</sup>.

T: En la misma página donde terminan todas las historias. ¿Y qué le pasa a esta nena al final?

Miguel: Se encuentra con la mamá.

T: Y en la historia de Ricitos de Oro, ¿sabemos qué le pasa al final?

CH: No.

(...)

Now the Librarian Teacher intervenes:

LT: Yo no conozco la historia de Ricitos de Oro. ¿Cómo era ella?

Carlos: De pelo amarillo.

LT: ¿Y cómo? ¿Cómo esa nena? (pointing to the girl in Browne's story)

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<sup>54</sup> Luna refers here to the first version of *Goldilock and the Three Bears*.

<sup>55</sup> In Anthony Browne's story, daddy bear and mummy bear talk about their jobs when going for a stroll in the park. In the traditional story there are no such details.

<sup>56</sup> There are here various interpretations to this answer. One is that all books end on the same page, that is, the last one. Another interpretation is that because picturebooks have endpapers that mark the beginning and end of the story and work as frameworks to the stories, children interpret that they end on the 'same' page. As T was quite baffled by the answer, she did not enquire further about it but reformulated.

Antonela: No, esa tiene pelo naranja y la otra es rubia y tiene trencitas.

Ezequiel: Tenía remera azul y tenía un vestido.

Maia: Tenía pelo Amarillo y con rulos.

LT: ¿Es esta historia similar, entonces?

CH: No...

LT: ¿No?

Luciano: No, porque la nena estaba en el bosque en la otra historia y en ésta está en la calle.

(T trying to round off and reach some kind of conclusion)

T: Entonces, estas historias, ¿se parecen mucho, un poquito o más o menos?

CH: Más o menos.

#### **4.2 Second presentation and reading**

The following week, the EFL Teacher (T) tells students they are going to the library again to read a book. The sitting arrangement is the same as in the previous experience. This time, T shows the cover of the picturebook and asks children if they remember the story. One of the girl, Bianca, retells it briefly. When, Bianca finishes, T makes children focus on the cover and asks them what they see. Emiliano answers: “Una familia de osos y una nena”. Carlos says he can see something else. He points to the little girl at the back<sup>57</sup>. T asks children why the girl is so small and Antonela says it is because she is far away (“porque está lejos”).

T starts ‘re-telling’ the story as if it were for the first time. As T reads the title “Me and...” some children (Antonela, Emiliano) complete it: “You”. She shows the endpapers and asks about the colours. This time more than one children respond; some say that one is “blue” (Emiliano) or “light blue” (Luna) and that the other is “yellow” (Facundo) or “dorado” (Emiliano). T asks what family they associate the blue/light blue page with and gives them the options (the bears’ or the girl’s family?). Several of them, quickly and unanimously, respond: “los osos”, and when asked why, Emiliano says: “Por la ropa del papa”. When they are asked what family they associate the yellow page with, they (Bianca, Carlos) answer the girl’s because of the colour of the girl’s hair (“Por el pelo de la nena”). T then asks what the endpapers (pointing to them) are for. Again, they say that they do not know.

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<sup>57</sup> Actually Carlos discovered the girl on the first reading of the book, when class was dismissed, but the intention was to work on these kind of details on a second moment. So at that time, T acknowledged Carlo’s observation and told him to remember to bring up that detail on the following meeting.

T shows children the title page and reads out the title again. There are two pictures under the title: one shows baby bear walking to the left and the other, next to the previous one, the girl walking to the right. They are pictures (cut-outs) taken from the story and the characters are turning their backs at each other. This time T enquires who might be “*Me*” as she points to herself. Facundo, among others, asserts: “el osito”. Then, T asks about “*You*”, and they quickly say: “la nena”. On the first page, T makes children have a closer look on the picture that presents the bears’ house. She reminds them that they had said it was house number three (“la casa número tres”). Now T asks children why there is that number on the house. Emiliano says it is because of the number of bears that live there (“porque hay tres osos”). T asks what else they can see, and some point to the red ball in the garden (Bianca), the sky full of poles and chimneys at the back (Miguel) and the head of an animal in the bottom-left corner (Merlina). T asks what animal that could be. They say it is a dog<sup>58</sup>.

T moves on to then make children compare the second double spread (where the girl gets lost) with the third double spread (when the girl finds the bears’ house) in terms of colours: “¿Hay algún cambio de color en la historia de la nena?” Children respond that on the last two frames of the third double spread the yellow colour appears. When teacher asks them why this must be so, they say it is because that is the bears’ house (“porque es la casa de los osos”). T asks children where the bears’ house is and Emiliano says: “en el parque”. Moving on to the sixth double spread, where there are apparently three pictures that are the same, T enquires children, on a closer look, if they are all the same frames. They answer: “no”<sup>59</sup>. With the help of T, children notice the lower part of the girl’s leg in the third frame, implying that, by the fourth frame she is already upstairs. Facundo exclaims: “¡está subiendo!”

When reaching the ninth double spread, T asks children who is looking at whom (point of view): “¿Y acá, quién mira a quién?” Children say that on the left (pointing to the left: “ahí”), it is the bears who are looking at the girl, and that on the right (“y ahí”), it is the girl who is looking at the bears<sup>60</sup>. T tries to make children notice the interplay of perspective in this double spread by asking them who would they be looking at if they had the eyes of the girl on the left page, and the eyes of the bears on the right page. Children fail to understand, so teacher insists:

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<sup>58</sup> It is difficult to tell if it is a dog or a wolf. If it is a dog, it is my impression that it is not a friendly one –the typical nice dog.

<sup>59</sup> The frames show different moments of the girl going up the stairs, but the differences are very subtle.

<sup>60</sup> Although what children say is correct, their response does not reflect that they were able to grasp the perspective put into play in this double spread.

Teacher: Si nos ponemos en el lugar de la nena, nos “ponemos” los ojos de la nena, ¿a quién estamos mirando? (pointing to the page on the left)

Children: A los osos.

Teacher: Aha, y si nos ponemos en el lugar de los osos, los “ojos” de los osos, ¿a quién estoy mirando? (pointing to the page on the right)

Children: A la nena.

When going on with the story, children’s attention is caught by the last frame on the left-hand page of the tenth double spread: graffiti appears on a tall building wall. Carlos comments that he usually pays attention to graffiti on the streets (“yo siempre miro los dibujos en la paredes”). A short exchange starts about whether it is “right” or “wrong” to write on walls and other buildings. T says that it is not “wrong” as long as they have permission to do so. Before turning the page, T asks children if they remember what baby bear wondered on the right-hand page. Children respond positively and say (Facundo, Antonela) that he wondered what had happened to the girl (“qué le había pasado a la nena”). So T asks children what happened to the girl. Luna, Thiago, Bianca, among others, say: “encuentra a la mama”. T turns the page and points to the sequence of frames on the following and last double spread. Luciano asks why she runs (“¿por qué corre?”) and T, in turn, asks the rest of the children. Emiliano answers that she does so to meet her mum (“para encontrarse con la mama”) and Carla says that she runs because she saw her mum (“porque vio a la mama”). Emiliano points that the mum looks like a dad too (“parece el papá”)<sup>61</sup>.

T then gets the book closer to the children and asks them if they are able to see anything else in the small frames. Children stand up and start pointing: a piece of paper and a shade (Facundo). T asks what the shades are. Bianca says they are a dog and a witch (“un perro y una bruja”). T asks if there had been a dog before and they answer that there had been a wolf before. T asks if they could be the same animal, that is, the same dog or the same wolf. They respond positively<sup>62</sup>. Next, T tries to make children connect these shades with the tone of the story. T asks how the girl feels at that point. Children (Emiliano, Thiago) say she feels scared (“se siente asustada”). Then T asks why a wolf and witch would appear there. Children remain silent. T then asks them how they feel about wolves and witches. Children say they make them feel scared. One

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<sup>61</sup> Like the “girl” in the story, the “mum” is not portrayed as the typical mother figure in fairy tales. She does not wear colourful, “motherly” clothes (a skirt and a blouse or a dress and an apron), but she wears gray trousers and a black coat. Her hair is cut quite short, which gives the impression of being either a man or a woman. This ambiguity gives the children more possibilities to identify themselves with the character according to their own reality. He or she could also be an older brother, sister, aunt, uncle, tutor, etc.

<sup>62</sup> Although children had claimed that the animal in the beginning was a dog and now they say it was a wolf, what is interesting to observe here is how a second reading allows for a retrospective look and consequently, more reflection upon certain details.

girl, Merlina, points that, for her, the witch is not a witch but the girl's mum with a hood: "puede ser la mamá, que tiene una capucha".

Finally, T shows the endpapers, and children point to the colours again: "dorado y azul". But Carlos observes that the colours are reversed, with respect to the first endpapers: "están al revés". T asks then what they signal. Children (Emiliano, Facundo) say they indicate that the story is over ("que se acabó la historia"). T asks if "the end" is written anywhere, and they say no. As final observations on the story, T asks children three more questions:

T: ¿Dónde se narra la historia; a la derecha o a la izquierda de las doble-páginas? (pointing to the pages)

Ch: A la izquierda.

T: Y en general, ¿cuántas imágenes o cuadros se usan para narrar la historia de la nena por página; uno o varios?

Ch: Varios.

T: ¿Qué historia es más colorida; la de la nena o la de los osos?

Ch: La de los osos.

T: ¿Y menos colorida?

Ch: La de la nena.

T: ¿De qué color es la historia de la nena?

Emiliano: Gris

T: ¿Por qué?

Ch: Porque vive en la ciudad.

T: ¿Y cómo se siente la nena la mayor parte del tiempo?

Ch: Triste.

T: ¿Y por qué está triste?

Emiliano: Porque pierde a la mamá.

And with that last exchange T decides to put an end to the activity/experience. The bell rings and children go to the break.



## 5. Analysis

From the experiences carried out with the group of 1<sup>st</sup> form children and the picturebook *Me and You* there extend several aspects and elements worthy of recovering and analysing in detail. Starting with some general observations on the experience and its different moments, this section will then delve into the more concrete aspects of children's responses that give account of how visual literacy can be developed, critical thinking exercised and, finally, how teachers' interventions as mediators enrich the encounter and the experience between the children and the picturebook.

### 5.1. General observations

As a first general observation, it is worth noticing and addressing something that has been mentioned before but that can now be asserted with precise data; in the same way as in the history of human beings, pictures have pervaded their environments as natural means of communication, children are, as well, surrounded by pictures and naturally attracted by images (by what they represent, the actions they describe and the plots they narrate). This was confirmed by the very first sight that children had at the cover of the picturebook *Me and You* and how hooked they remained on the book throughout the entire 'reading'. Although the biggest picture on the cover is the portrait of The Bear Family, children's attention was mostly drawn to the small sequence of pictures at the bottom that tells part of the story of the girl. This premise is reinforced by the eagerness children showed (for example, Beymar) to describe what they see, know or think is happening ("Se comió la comida del bebé, se sentó en la silla del bebé..." etc.). This can be also due to the fact that this sequence of small pictures denotes action, and it is the sequence of actions that makes a story more memorable and allow children to connect with their schemata<sup>63</sup>.

Another general aspect to recover, as pointed above, is the level of attention paid by the children considering the time that the experience took (about half an hour for the first moment, and twenty minutes for the second) and the complexity of the story. Although it is impossible to assert that all children were equally paying attention and following the story, it is also an understatement on the part of the observers (the teachers here) to consider the opposite; that not all children were paying attention. What can be seen from the recording is that children behaved well and were, in general, enjoying the activity as they followed the story and intervened. It must not be overlooked that just because not all the children were staying still, sitting down properly or answering the T's questions, they were not *seeing*, listening and, most importantly, thinking and responding to themselves about the story. Not all children are equally eager to speak out or say what they think,

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<sup>63</sup> Any previous experience and knowledge children had about the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

just as not all adults are willing to do so too. Also there seems to be a tendency that it is the same children (especially some boys) that are more outspoken than the rest, which again does not imply that the rest was not following or thinking about the story in the same way. My personal impression, in consonance with the LT, was that these children were enjoying the activity enormously, and that if some of them were diverting their attention at some point it was just because it is very hard, especially for kids under seven, to remain still and quiet for around twenty-five minutes without a break or change of place, posture, etc. Conversely, remaining silent and quiet does not mean that children are following and/or understanding the lesson, as we teachers have witnessed with experience<sup>64</sup>.

Last but not least, it is interesting to compare how on a second *seeing* and *reading* of the same picturebook, children's attention did not decay. On the contrary, and although they knew the story, children seemed equally engaged in the interplay of plots, while they eagerly participated in the exchanges with the teachers and peers, since this second reading gave room for more interaction to take place. As a key aspect of this second exploration into the same story, it must be observed that this had a purpose on its own. It was not just 'reading' the same picturebook in the same way as before, as it could have been the case. The objective of this second reading in the experience was to give children more time to really *see* the pictures (the details, the colours, the sequences, etc.), once they were already familiar with the plot. In other words, the T was fostering a conscious observation of the images and with it, a more conscious reading of the pictures. In short, she was trying to develop children's visual literacy.

A second reading of the pictures allows for the observance of artistic details and techniques used to enhance images and that give room for further interpretation of these images in their own context. For example, as children had noticed that there was only a couple of frames that are in more luminous colour (a bright yellow) in the story of the girl, it was then appropriate to ask why it was so. Children, as they were familiar with the story and had had the time to *see* these details had no problems in making the proper connections: "porque es la casa de los osos" or "porque se ve/encuentra con la mamá". These types of questions are what allowed for the exercise and development of critical thinking in children under seven. This kind of analysis on the part of the children could not have been achieved during the first reading due to the fact that they were still

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<sup>64</sup> Probably, if teachers try to keep their lessons in order and are able to call their students' attention, the instances teaching-learning processes taken place in class are greater and more effective, but again, nobody (adults, peers or parents) can ever know what is going on in (other) students' (or someone else's) mind.

finding out what the story was about. So the sustained work (at least a two-moment work) on the same picturebook favoured the development of both visual literacy and critical thinking.

## **5.2. Visual literacy**

As discussed at the beginning of this work, visual literacy (the capacity of seeing images as if reading texts, roughly speaking) is a natural skill that needs to be fully developed if children are expected to be able to read the world. This is a key ability to develop in students when it comes to really *see* and *decode* what they are looking at (that is, to be able to uncover layers of meaning). This skill, as well, is nurtured by multiperspectivism since people see and read the world in a myriad of ways, according to many factors (their background, culture, experience, etc.), and it allows children to become more independent in their own choices and within their own possibilities. Therefore, while helping children become visual literate, teachers need to be aware not to condition or censor children's own seeing and reading. The problem is that, sometimes, once people are told how things are (e.g. through the reinforcement of stereotypes) and what to think (e.g. as part of an ideology), it becomes harder and harder to *see* and *think* things differently and question what is assumed, given and generally accepted. These preconceptions, ideas and prejudices can be found in both teachers' interventions and children's answers.

To exemplify the above mentioned situation, we can recover from children's response to the question of who is going up the stairs first when the bears go back home and realise that someone had been eating their porridge and sitting on their chairs. Although the picture (right-hand page of the eighth double-page) shows Mama Bear's leg going up first while Papa Bear says: "Do be careful, dear", children said that it was Papa Bear who went first. So, despite the fact that children are looking at the picture, they are not really seeing. This gives evidence that, first, children's ability to *see* has not been well-trained yet to read images so keenly or to spot the small details (they are just "beginners" in their reading of picturebooks) and second, they are probably dragged by prior knowledge (the way the traditional story would go) or by socio-cultural assumptions experienced so far (in societies that have a strong patriarchal influence, it is the "man" who should be brave and go first to protect his family from danger). These are two aspects that need to be tackled in the future if children are expected to become competent readers and critical thinkers, as we believe they can.

Another instance where the way someone has been brought up (how their contexts have influenced them) and has shaped their ideas and conceptions can be seen in the teacher's own comments. When Miguel says that the girl got scared as she lost her way ("se asustó"), the teacher observes: "No sé, no dice nada de eso. ¿Ven ustedes alguna palabra? ¿Hay palabras acá?" pointing to the sequence of pictures on the left-hand page. Children shake their heads and answer negatively.

This intervention on the part of the teacher reveals, first, that she is not such a competent visual reader either, and second, that as she has been brought up in, especially, a school context, where the written words are more important than the images you may find (or we are expected to communicate always with words), her comment may imply that she expects to find all the answers and the truth of the story in words and letters. This is a prejudice on the part of the teacher who does not realise at that moment that there is no need for words to explain what the pictures so clearly narrate. It is not necessary to read anything since the images say it. Unfortunately, the teacher was not able to reflect upon this at the time of the experience, and rather censored what the student (Miguel) said, lecturing him and the other children<sup>65</sup>.

Continuing with the analysis of children's interventions and responses during the experience regarding aspects of visual literacy, there are instances of quick associations between images and words on the part of the students worthy of recovering. For example, when the teacher presented the title page for the second time, read out the title and asked who was *Me* and who was *You*, the fact that there is the picture of the Baby Bear and the picture of the girl in two differentiated frames under the title, probably helped children better interpret that *Me* was the Baby Bear and *You*, the girl, which was what they answered. So, making students focus on the correspondence between words and pictures and how they can interplay to help them understand who tells the story, for instance, is also key to contribute to the development of visual literacy. The more children are drawn to these visual games, the more they will profit from thinking about them, especially when reading works of the same author who tends to scatter similar traces on the pages.

Going back to the concept of the narrator (who tells the story, and therefore, whose point of view is adopted) and the need to go over, at least, a second look or *reading* at pictures, let us examine the interchange that the teacher has with the children. To make students realise who sees whom in the ninth double-page, the teacher insisted on perspective ("si nos ponemos en el lugar de la nena, nos ponemos los ojos de la nena, ¿a quién estamos mirando?"). This allowed children to rethink the play on perspectives and to reformulate their answer. The teacher could have left the matter behind after her first enquiry, but she insisted on the observation of the pictures. Here the analysis on visual literacy overlaps, as happens most of the times, with the role that teachers play as mediators between children and images, and how the formers can become better readers of

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<sup>65</sup> I, being the teacher in charge of the experience and being able to analyse it in retrospective, can undergo a process of self-reflection that allows me to see myself differently. That is, this work has allowed me to reflect upon the positive and negative attitudes that we all teachers have when we are teaching. The important thing here is to realise about it to try to repeat what was considered a good intervention and to avoid what might not have been the best way to intervene or act with the students.

picturbooks with proper guidance and stimuli. Probably, the teacher's strategy of asking children to put on the "girl's eyes" and then on the "bears' eyes" is what made all the difference.

However, children were able to recognise simple elements that imply distance perspective. For example, during the second reading, when the teacher presents the cover of the book to the class to have a closer look at it, Carlos spots the little girl (human-like shape) at the back. When the teacher asks why she is so small compared to the The Bears family, Antonela replies that it is because the girl is far away ("porque está lejos"). So children may have some difficulties in dealing (on their own) with the special play on perspective and point of view that takes place at some point in the story, but they are clearly able to *read* how perspective and distance are implied in drawings or pictures (flat surfaces or two dimensional representations). Paying attention to details such as this one on perspective can pave the way to analyse other concepts in drawing with children (scale, shades, colours, textures, movement, time lapses, number of frames to tell a story, etc.)

By the end of the second reading of the story, Carlos makes a comment on graffiti. As he notices that the last frame on the left-hand page of the tenth double-page shows a tall building with its wall painted and written as if with aerosol, a short discussion among children and teacher arises on the subject (whether graffiti are allowed or not in public places and what sort of graffiti are). This proves how children's environment is full of images and how the young do not remain impervious to them. On the contrary, and as exposed before, children are attracted and influenced by graphics and drawings (graffiti in this case). On another level, Carlos's comment reveals the connection he is able to make between the story and his immediate context (his neighbourhood and his city), which gives way, in turn, to a deeper analysis of instances of critical thinking on the part of the students.

### **5.3.Critical Thinking**

As stated at some point in the introduction to this work, critical thinking is a highly complex process that involves, in turn, multiple sub-processes or skills, such as conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesizing & evaluating information in order to be able to innovate, create and reach to personal conclusions. Generally speaking, it is assumed that such set of abilities might be very well expected from people with a certain development and training of their cognitive aptitudes, or of a group of students of a certain age and maturity at school. Therefore, these processes seem, at first sight, rather difficult to put into practice with children under seven years old, as was the group of students selected for this experience. However, as it has by now demonstrated and as it was also stated in the introduction, concrete and simple instances of critical thinking can be recovered from

children's responses to teachers and interactions among them if they were encouraged to respond and then all together, teachers and students, analysed and contextualised those responses.

If teachers are capable of taking into account children's answers and analyse them according to socio-cognitive-constructivist theories, without taking these to limit students' capacities but, on the contrary, to broaden teachers' understanding and appreciation of them, then we are convinced that in children's responses there are plenty of instances of critical thinking to single out. For example, when Luciano sees the first page, he says: "Es una familia de osos". Then when T turns the page, several children (Facundo, Maia) say "humanos" pointing to the left-hand page (which is where the story of the girl and the "mum" takes place). Although these comments might seem obvious and of little importance, what underlies here is, first, that none of the teachers asked for any description on the part of the students about the type of families portrayed. However, Luciano's spontaneous observation is followed by other children's spontaneous comments that are highly connected. A comparison has been established between the two depictions: there is a "bear family" and there is a "human family". The semantic field is that of "families" and they differ in their "types". What also helped children make this distinction is the fact that in the picturebook the Bears Family is an instance of anthropomorphism intensified by the classic nuclear family of father mother and child.

Another instance of critical thinking can be recovered from children's also spontaneous comments when reaching the end of the story on the first 'reading'. T had presented the first double-page endpapers and children (especially Beymar) had singled out the colours ("color azul y color amarillo"). However, T had not said what they were for<sup>66</sup>, or anticipated that they would re-appear at the end of the book. When reaching the end (when the girl meets "her mum"), there is nothing that actually signals the end (and one might be expecting for the story to go on), but the immediate closing double-page endpapers, as teacher finally turns the page. Children spontaneously say "fin". It is clear here that children could grasp the structure of the picturebook, especially the fact that it is "framed" by the endpapers. This connection was established on their own and provides good example of another thinking skill put into practice: that of associating and resorting to previous knowledge<sup>67</sup> to deduce a conclusion.

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<sup>66</sup> Endpapers ("guardas" in Spanish) served in the beginning as the papers that covered the pages of a publication, a story, a novel, etc. Now, they serve as decorative elements and add tone and a form of introduction to the story. Endpapers always relate to the theme, setting or characters in the story and may be worthy of an analysis on their own.

<sup>67</sup> Children may have had some previous knowledge of endpapers since they had been in contact with picturebooks in Spanish, for example, when visiting the library and with the home-room teacher.

Luciano's question if the girl in the story is really a girl or a boy in the middle of the first reading and Emiliano's comment on the girl's mother ("parece el papá") during the second reading of the book and with reference to the last picture of the story (when the girl meets her mum) are also worth recovering and examining. First, because the question and comment relate both to stereotypes: what someone looks like is not necessary what someone really is or what they intend to be. In other words, looks are deceiving and nowhere is written how boys and men or girls and women should dress, look, act, etc. They are all cultural conventions. Second, the children's enquires and observations serve as interesting material to work on and think about assumptions and preconceptions. Although this was not further discussed, teacher's respond to Luciano's comment ("no sé, ¿es una nena?") had the intention of opening up the challenge for children to draw their own conclusions, or at least, to keep thinking about the matter. Some of them, probably influenced by what they already knew, asserted: "¡Es Ricitos de Oro!"<sup>68</sup>, and then the issue was dropped.

During the second reading of the story, when children were allotted more time to see, *read* and think about the pictures, the teacher brings back two topics to further consider in class. The first one is what colours of the endpapers they associate the characters with. The teacher gives them the option of the "families" (the bears' or the girl's) and children (among them, Facundo, Bianca and Emiliano) assert: "azul con los osos por la ropa del papa" and "amarillo con la nena por el pelo de la nena). So here children quick response about characters and colours give a simple account of how young kids are able to associate and justify their answers. Also, when the teacher brings back the detail of the number on The Bears' house that Emiliano had already spotted during the first reading, and she asks why there is a number three, again Emiliano quickly replies: "porque hay tres osos". These are instances of critical thinking that must not be overlooked when working with children and picturebooks, since this makes the experience more interesting, memorable and interactive<sup>69</sup>.

Finally, and also with reference to the type of associations that children were able to make during their second reading of the story, there is one more case that is worth recovering from the very end of the experience. That is when the teacher asks students what colour is used to narrate the story of the girl, to which Emiliano quickly replies "gris". And when the teacher asks children why, they say because the character lives in the city ("porque vive en la ciudad"). As the teacher wants to make children further associate the colour to the tone of the story, she then asks students how the

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<sup>68</sup> Now one can wonder, what if "Ricitos de Oro" were a boy... Could that be the case/possible? Should he be named "Ricitos" or should he be given another name? Why cannot be a boy the "human" character, and a she-bear the "Baby Bear" character? This would be an interesting issue to think and discuss with children on a later encounter.

<sup>69</sup> Maybe, with time and proper training, children will spontaneously think and speak about these details or interplay of images and symbols. They may also be able to elaborate and venture more complex responses to new puzzling enigmas, which both adults and children can enjoy and think about.

girl feels, and they answer that she is sad (“triste”). Finally, the teacher asks them why she is sad and Emiliano concludes by saying: “porque perdió a la mama”. Although children were not able to make all these associations on their own, the exchange proposed by the teacher proved that children are able to make some associations (colour and place, feelings and causes, etc.) but that they need, probably, further guidance, more exposure and work on the relation(s) between (and among) colours, tones, places, feelings, etc. to be able to synthesise or arrive at more complex conclusions on their own.

#### **5.4. Teachers as mediators**

Regarding the role of the teachers as mediators there are at least two main aspects to recover from how the experience was carried out with the children. The first one is the positive attitude that teachers had towards the group of students and their capacity to deal with the complexity of a picturebook like Browne’s *Me and You*. The second aspect is the way the whole experience was thought, planned and carried out. Given the complexity of the story and the richness of the pictures, children and teacher needed more than just one ‘reading’ of the picturebook. However, these two set-apart ‘readings’ could not have the same purpose or be carried out in the same way. Therefore, two different objectives were devised in advance for the two different moments.

The first presentation and reading of the picturebook had the objective of exposing children to the book; of letting them have a “first contact” with the story and pictures. Therefore, what is to recover from this first moment is the lack of intervention on the part of the teachers, especially of the EFL teacher. Her role was limited to the presentation of the picturebook, marking the sequence of pictures or frames in the story (so that children would not get lost) and reading out only where there was text. Teachers’ interventions were, in general, scarce, unless children asked about something in particular. Such was the case, for example, when Luciano asked about the main human character in the story (“¿es una nena?”). In that case, the teacher did not assert or deny, but asked students back in order to avoid telling them what she thought and to allow them to think on their own<sup>70</sup>.

The minimum intervention on the part of the teachers and their interest to generate an environment where children would be able to freely think and speak their minds put the teachers in a central place as mediators (mediating between the book and the children) but in a subordinate

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<sup>70</sup> It is interesting to mention here that not even the teacher was sure if the character was a boy or a girl or something in between. She thought she should be very careful when telling them about this since it could influence them, and the truth is that teachers have always had the role of telling children how things are, so instead of restricting children’s thoughts, teacher’s question intended to open the matter and allow children to thin on their own.



place as “sources” of information and knowledge. The focus here is not so much on what teachers can tell or explain to students, but on how teachers can make students think, elaborate upon and speak out. This was a key concept to understand the role that the teachers would play as mediators when working with the picturebook, but that could be put into practice when working in other areas with other materials. By taking a mediating role between children and picturebooks, teachers allowed, as well, for the mediation between children and knowledge, where the focus is more on the process or processes –a “let us all think about it” or “figure it out together” approach– of building (and opening) up meaning than on reaching the correct answer or getting at the right “product”.

The second ‘reading’ of the picturebook had, as well, a clear objective that was thought and planned in accordance to the purposes of the experience. This consisted on the ‘re-reading’ and, especially, on the *re-seeing* of the pictures that told both stories (the “girl’s” and the “bear’s”) to first “sharpen” children’s eyes (make students really *see*/pay attention to the details) and then to try to make them see the possible connection(s) between the details and the story. Again, the teacher did not indicate to students where the details were (or asked what they were for), but let the children have a better and closer look at the pictures so that they would say what they saw or called their attention. It was interesting to witness how eager children were to tell what elements they could spot. Students did not question why those elements were there, but neither did the teachers. This questioning was avoided so as to not cut the flow of the story. Children seemed to be enjoying the mere game of “spotting” elements, although not all students’ observations or interpretations coincided. For example, some said that the animal’s head that sticks out on the first page is a dog’s head, while others said it was a wolf’s head. However, the teacher did not deny or assert but let the children express what they thought.

So, on this second reading of the story, the teacher’s intention was not to focus so much on why the small details<sup>71</sup> (the little scattered cues among the pages) were there, but on more general and concrete elements that also added new meaning to (or a different view on) the story. For example, as recovered before, Browne’s story is told from the point of view of the “baby bear”. Since the teacher considered this an important aspect to single out and make students realise of it (or at least, think about it) she insists on this reflection. With the teacher’s mediation (“Si nos ponemos en el lugar de la nena, nos “ponemos” los ojos de la nena, ¿a quién estamos mirando?”)

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<sup>71</sup> Most of the details, which are quite a number, pose lots of questions and allow for multiple interpretations that were thought to exceed the purpose of the present work, especially since children are young, tend to get distracted and are remarkably sincere in their answers. For example, when asked why there was the presence of certain element in the story, they simply answered that they did not know. This gives proof that picturebooks are not only for children but for a vast and varied audience that is willing to pick up the small cues and see the big pictures to solve (or find) new mysteries.

children were able to have a better understanding of or, at least, an approximation to the concepts of point of view and perspective.

The teachers played also key roles as mediators when it came to the establishment of comparisons between the traditional version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and Browne's story. First, when the Librarian Teacher told students she did not know how the "other" Ricitos was, since she had not been told that story, she asked children to describe the character to her. This comment and requirement from the LT made children remember the other story and compare it with *Me and You*. Then, when children seemed a bit confused about where the stories took place ("¿en el bosque viven estos osos?") and if they were similar or not ("estas historias, ¿se parecen mucho, un poquito, o más o menos?"), the EFL teacher tries to guide them in their answers. Although it is difficult to tell how much teachers may be influencing students' answers, which is probably the case and becomes almost unavoidable, in their honest and well-intended attempt to make students think lies the justification to their interventions.

## Conclusion

This work had the specific aim of exploring how picturebooks could be used in the EFL lesson, in articulation with the L1/MT language, to contribute to the development of children's visual literacy and critical thinking, and how teachers' roles as mediators could favour such developments and processes in young learners. The data analysis carried out from the experiences registered with the group of children selected for this work gave ample evidence that not only can the use of picturebooks in class be the appropriate material for the purposes described above, but also that through a sustained work on the same picturebook and the thoughtful mediation of the teachers, the experience can be doubly enriching and enjoyable for both parts (students and teachers).

The picturebook selected for the experience proved to contain in itself enough elements to hook children under seven to the plot of the story. The sequence of actions that the pictures describe and tell, together with the various elements and details that the images contain, make up for rich material for teachers to start using and exploring with young learners, so that children themselves can start doing their own 'readings' of pictures and images. But this picturebook in particular needed at least two readings for children to understand the plot and spot the details. Teacher's minimum intervention (the fact that she remained silent while children observed and spoke) and the considerable time allotted for the contemplation of the pictures and for children to elaborate their thoughts, allowed the young learners not only to look more deeply into the visuals (see and read the details), but also to connect and express freely about what they saw and thought.

To conclude, this work has given proof that the use of picturebooks is appropriate material to develop children's literacy and foster critical thinking in young learners, and that with sustained work on the same picturebook, children can become competent readers of texts, images and the combination of both, with all the symbolic elements that they carry. In fact, the use of picturebooks can be the door to other forms of multimodal texts to be included, used and explored in class, such as video games, paintings, cartoons, comics, short films, etc. In a highly visual world, as the one we live in today, the educator needs to be ready to include in their lessons the whole range of visuals and multimodal texts that surround their and the children's everyday life.

## Some final comments

While transcribing the experiences with the group of children and the picturebook, and while analysing teachers' interventions and the children's answers and comments, two important things cropped up. One is that when trying to separate aspects of visual literacy, critical thinking and the role of the teachers to analyse in detail, these areas or fields intertwined and overlapped in such a way that it was sometimes very difficult to establish to what section of the analysis they belonged to. My impression is that, although we generally tend to separate, classify and put things in a certain order, in reality, all mental processes (i.e. any conscious cognitive process such as reading, observing, speaking, etc.) are more connected than we thought them to be. For example, it was sometimes almost impossible to distinguish between a 'visual literacy' comment and a more 'critical thinking' one, and on top, these processes were usually mediated by other people (teachers and other peers in this case). So, albeit clear-cut and neat the analysis of the different aspects intended to be for this work, these aspects kept overlapping one with the other.

Another observation that cropped up was that once the experience was over, many more activities could have been carried out with the children. They could not been done for different reasons, but mainly because lessons were over when the analysis for this work took place. However, there were many other aspects of the story that would have been interesting to look into again with the same group of children. For example, among the many loose thoughts that remain fleeting in my mind to discuss together with the kids are:

- How can a story be told? Only with words (text)? Only with pictures? Or, with words and with pictures? What is more important in this story in particular? Is it the words, the pictures or both?
- What is the function of certain elements in the story? (the dog/wolf on the first page, the shades on the last double-page, etc.) How do they connect to the story?
- Is The Bear Family similar to the girl's? What is different? How can be families be different? What is your family more like?
- Going back to the human character in the story, does it matter if it is a boy or girl? Would the story be different if it is a boy? And if the mother is the father?
- Have you read any other story of this author? If yes, are they similar to this one? In what way? If not, would you like to?
- What story did you like best: *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* or *Me and You*? Why?

All the above questions spring from further pedagogical thinking about the stories and the picturebook. Some of them, as explained before, were thought to exceed the aims of the present work, and some were thought about after the experiences when it was necessary to start analysing what had already been recorded. However, I personally think that all the above questions can be taken up again, with the same group of children, on another occasion, for example, the following year. In fact, it would be very interesting to see, hear and analyse what these same children have to say in a year's time on the same picturebook and on the issues and aspects dealt in the present work. But that should be part of another journey. For the time being, I hope you have enjoyed this one.

“So be sure when you step.  
Step with care and great tact  
and remember that Life's  
a Great Balancing Act.”

*Oh, The Places You'll Go!* (Dr. Seuss: 1990)

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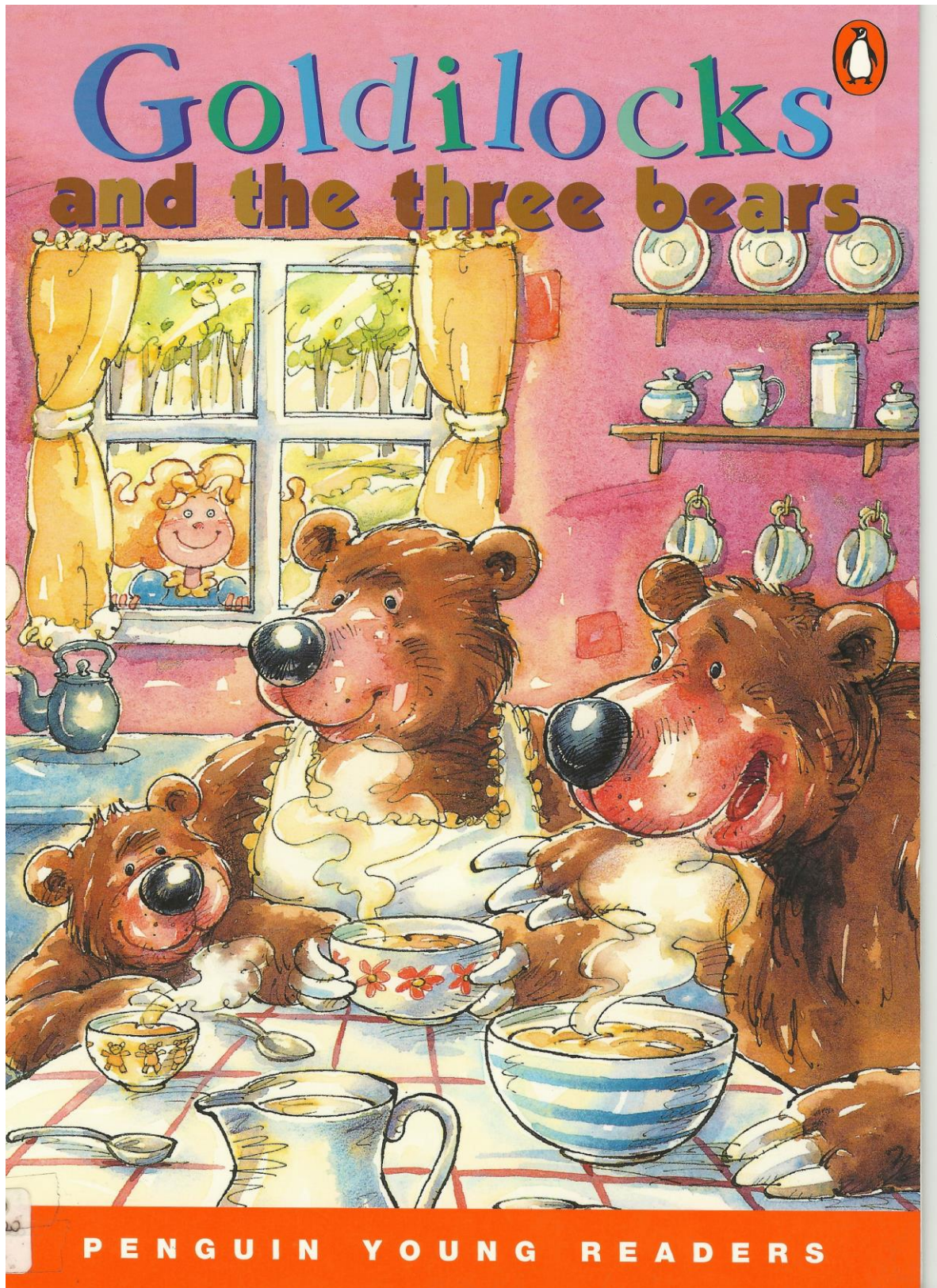
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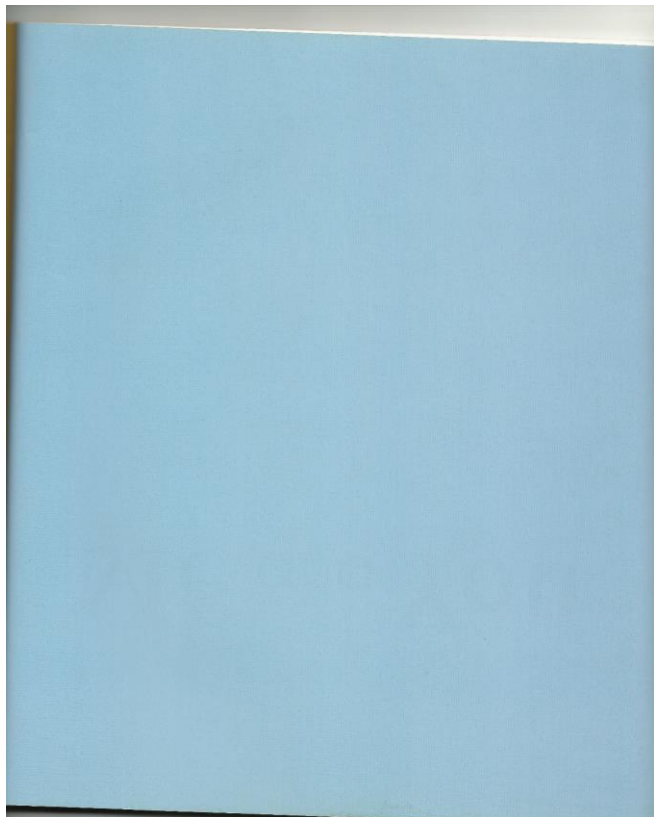
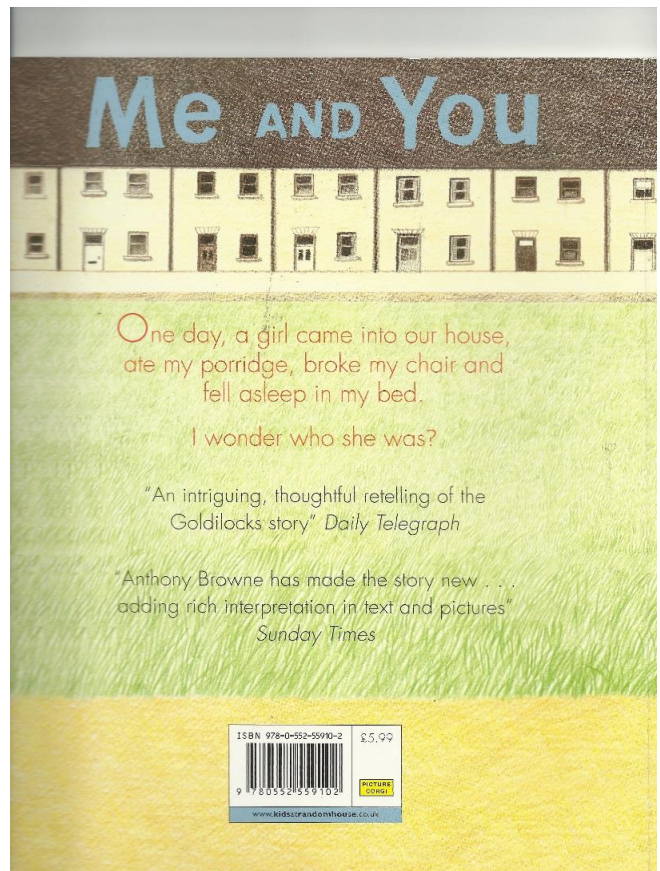
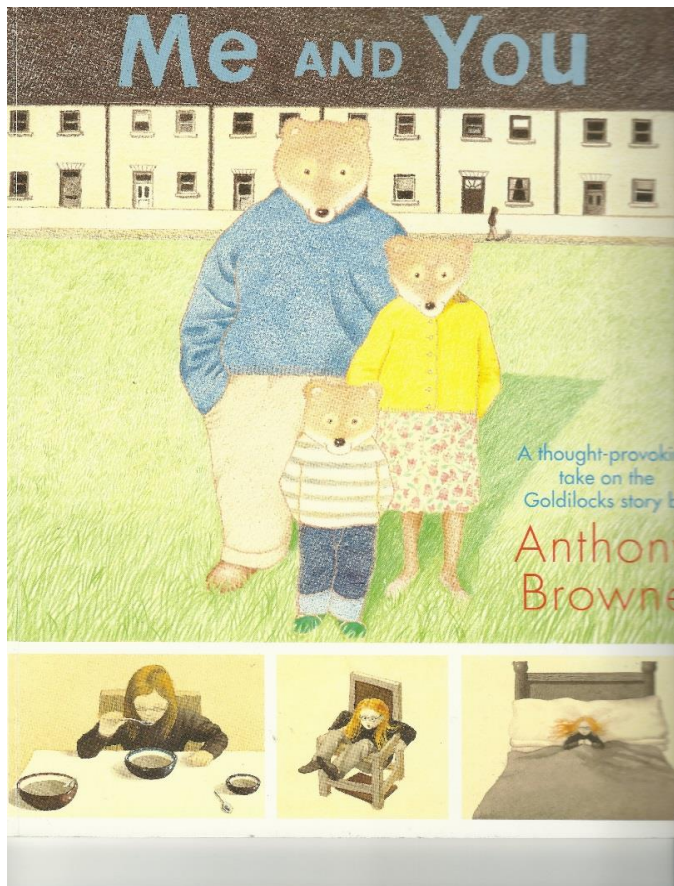
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For all the underdogs

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A Random House Group Company

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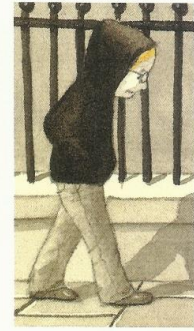
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# Anthony Browne Me and You

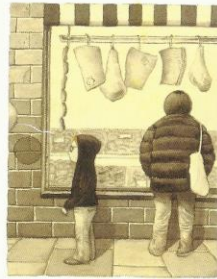
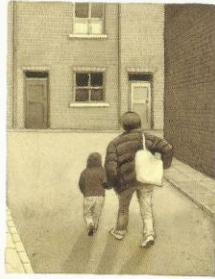


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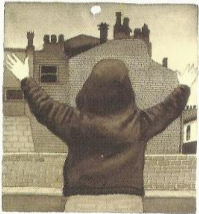
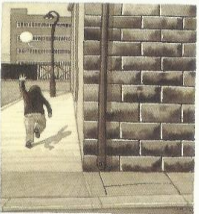
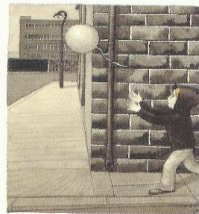
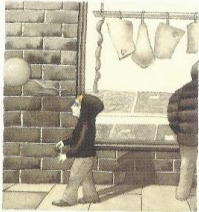


This is our house.





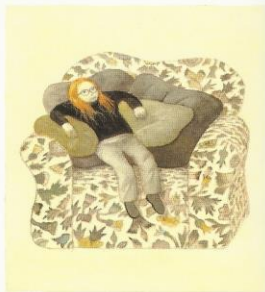
There's Daddy Bear, Mummy Bear and me.



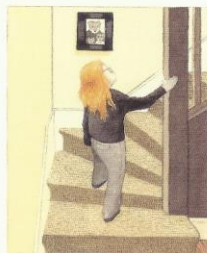
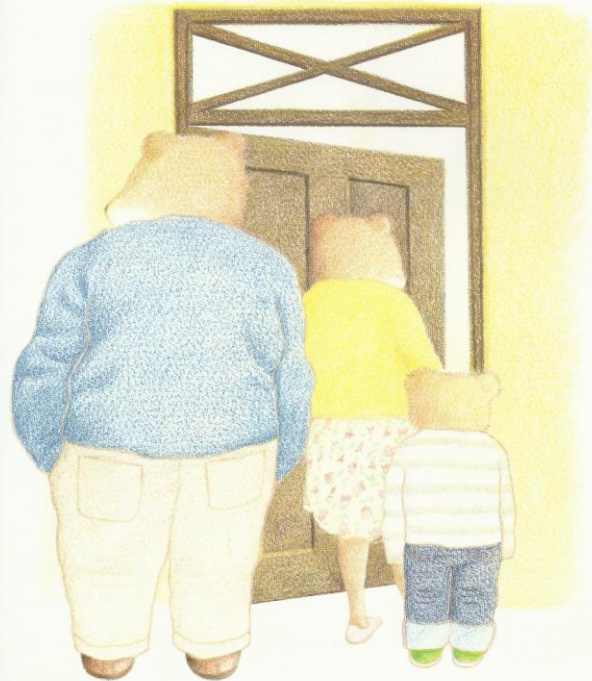
One morning Mummy made porridge for breakfast, but it was too hot to eat. "Let's all go out for a gentle stroll in the park while it cools down," said Daddy. So we did.



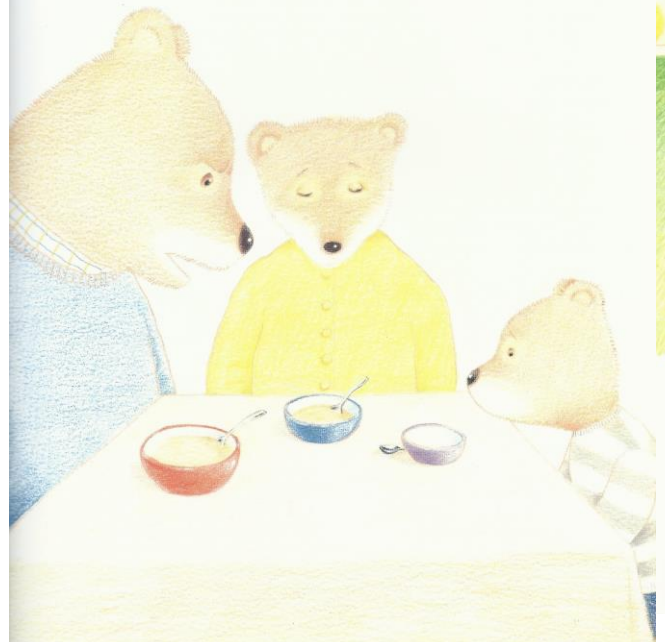




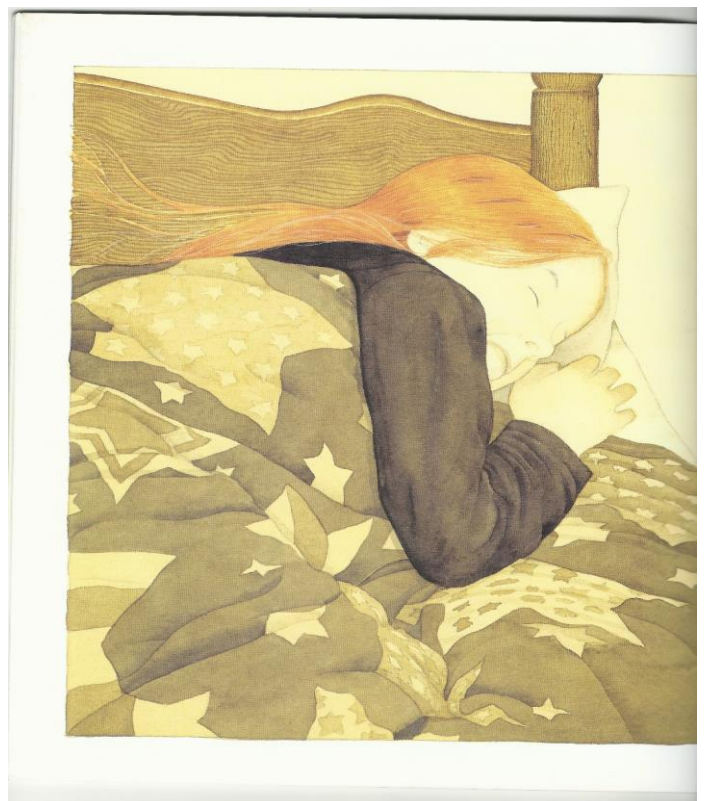
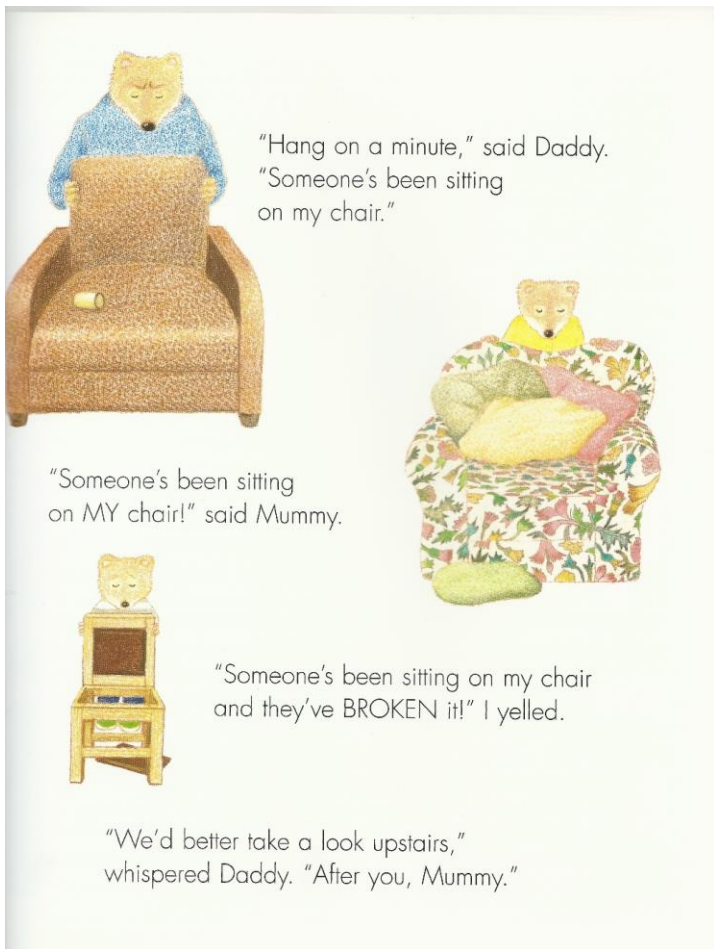
When we got home, the front door was open.  
Daddy said that Mummy must have left it open,  
and Mummy said it must have been Daddy.  
I didn't say anything.



Daddy saw his spoon sticking out of his porridge.  
"That's funny . . ." he said.  
Mummy saw her spoon. "That's funny . . ." she said.  
Then I saw that my bowl was empty. "That's not  
funny," I said. "Someone's eaten all my porridge."



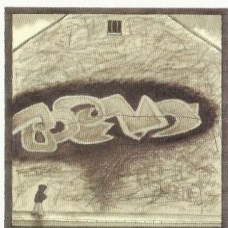
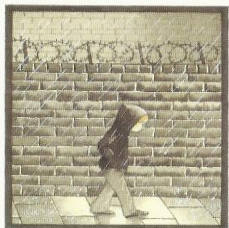
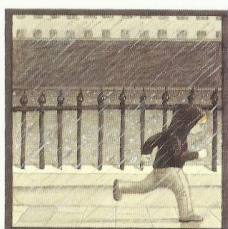
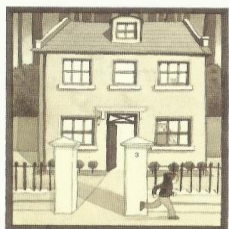
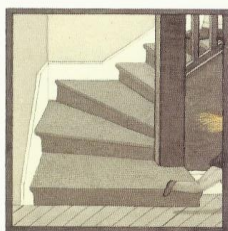




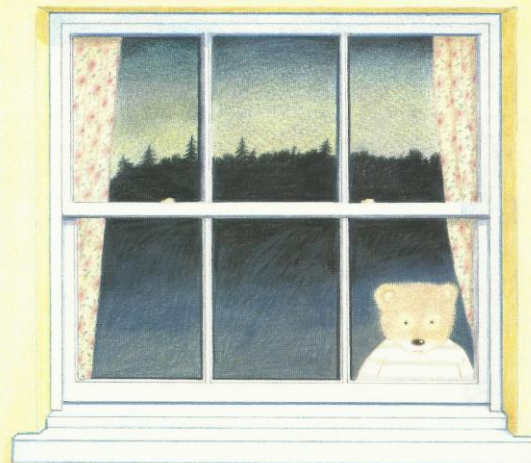




"Oh no," Daddy said. "SOMEONE'S been in my bed!"  
 "Oh!" shrieked Mummy. "Someone's been in MY bed!"  
 "Someone's been in my bed," I said, "and they're STILL THERE!"



The girl leaped out of bed, ran downstairs  
 and out of the door.



I wonder what happened to her?



