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## Review Article

# Destroying walls and building bridges through children's literature

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## Abstract

Implementing methodological approaches and pedagogical activities using Children's Literature which promotes critical thinking in schools and universities is progressively becoming a priority within the Spanish Ministry of Education and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as one of the pillars underpinning the current teacher training in Spanish higher education scenario, together with the responsibility of local Elementary Schools to educate critical citizens. Therefore, lecturers and researchers are encouraged to link the content of Children's Literature books to some modules in the undergraduate students' degrees such as English Studies Degree and Teacher Training, providing a reflective framework that promotes the emancipation and introducing brand new topics that require pushing the boundaries outside the comfort zone and applying critical thinking and other related cross-curricular competences in the learning process of our students. This paper represents the selection of two picture books: *Walking to School* (2008) by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Michael Dooling and *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (2007) by Peter Sís, in order to design tasks and relevant learning environments that focus on certain learning affordances while raising awareness in the main topics of Across the Borders Literature.

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**Ethics statement:** We hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study.

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## Çocuk edebiyatı ile köprülerin inşası ve sınırların kaldırılması

### Öz

Okullarda ve üniversitelerde eleştirel düşünmeyi teşvik eden çocuk edebiyatını kullanarak metodolojik yaklaşımları ve pedagojik etkinlikleri uygulamak, İspanya Eğitim Bakanlığı ve Avrupa Yüksek Öğretim Alanı (EHEA) içerisinde, yerel okulların eleştirel vatandaşlık sağlama sorumluluğu ile birlikte, İspanyol yüksek öğrenimde mevcut öğretmen eğitiminin temelini oluşturan sütunlardan biri olarak giderek bir öncelik haline gelmektedir. Bu nedenle, öğretim görevlileri ve araştırmacılar, çocuk edebiyatı kitaplarının içeriğini, İngilizce Çalışmaları ve Öğretmen Eğitimi gibi lisans öğrencilerinin eğitimindeki bazı modüllere bağlayarak özgürleşmeyi teşvik eden yansıtıcı bir çerçeve sağlamaya ve zorlanmayı gerektiren yepyeni konuları tanıtmaya teşvik edilmektedir. Bu makale, Sınır Ötesi Edebiyatının temel konularına ilişkin farkındalık yaratırken, belirli öğrenme yeterliliklerine odaklanan görevler ve ilgili öğrenme ortamları tasarlamak amacıyla Michael Dooling'in resimleştirdiği Eve Bunting'in *Walking to School* (2008), ve Peter Sis'in (2007) *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* başlıklı eseri olmak üzere iki resimli kitaba odaklanmıştır.

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## Introduction

For the last twenty years, the different ministerial communiqués within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have shaped the common third level education project in all its dimensions. What seemed first a matter of structural reforms aimed at achieving comparability criteria among European universities (ECTS credits, enhancing mobility) has lately turned towards rather pedagogical standpoints centered around the student as the main element in their very own education process (Martínez-Carrasco, 2017). This constructivist turn on the nature and the characteristics of knowledge and knowledge acquisition underpinned by current trends in education studies and educational psychology, has triggered a number of pedagogical reforms done by the Ministry of Education in Spain, too (LOMCE, 2013). Among them, the competence construct has gained unprecedented momentum given its ability to combine procedural knowledge (know *how*, that is, the practical application of theory) with the classic declarative knowledge, traditionally cultivated in higher education centers (know *that*, the critical thinking, or metalinguistic knowledge).

Yet, this is only a reflection of the way institutions, and society as a whole, conceptualize reality in a given time and a given moment. Not so long ago, from an epistemological perspective, it was common sense to claim that reality was self-existing. The world was understood to exist objectively, independent of the human mind and external to the knower, and so education was conceived a means to grasp the objective connections among the different elements that formed a particular phenomenon. The instructor, therefore, was understood as the unique source of knowledge in the classroom, and was meant to present their students with the relevant ‘units of knowledge’ in order for them to learn and cognitively retrieve when assessment was due.

While it is true that these positivist approaches to education were progressively left behind during the 1950s and 1960s under the influence of pragmatism, postmodernism, social constructivism and other post-positivist epistemological trends, the reflection above allows us to see the bigger picture and realize what the shift has been like in our understanding of knowledge: from something static and self-existing to something that is construed, interpreted (Boghossion, 2006), on the basis of a particular context and particular circumstances, subject to the active engagement of the learner (Jenkins, 2000). This constructivist viewpoint shared by the Spanish Ministry of Education as well as that the EHEA hints in its latest communiqué (EHEA, 2018) does address several valid points: understanding learning as temporary, developmental, and socially and culturally mediated (Brooks & Brooks, 2001), understanding learning as a self-regulatory process that puts into question the learner’s existing personal models of the world whenever new conflicting input is presented, understanding learning as a re-contextualization of the self. Yet, it fails to acknowledge is nothing but a consensus of beliefs (Rorty, 2001) and therefore is subject to particular narratives of social acceptability and subversion. In these frames, “teachers are often cast as cultural agents, largely unaware of their participation in the perpetuation of established mind-sets and practices” (Sarroub & Quadros, 2015), unaware that they do built walls and that the discourse cannot be but inherently political (Freire, 1970).

The definition of the word “wall” could apparently seem simple; nevertheless, a figurative meaning can be inferred if we read beyond. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) a wall is “a continuous vertical brick or stone structure that encloses or

divides an area of land”. This is the most common use of the word wall, but, sometimes this concept comes to life – metaphorically speaking – when it symbolizes segregation and division due to religious, political, cultural, and racist conflicts. Currently there are many physical walls built up in order to segregate people, and among those well-known in the Spanish collective imagery (Romero, 2017), there are three international borders that outstanding the most: (i) Operation Gatekeeper; (ii) Israeli West Bank barrier, and (iii) Cyprus’ Green Line. The first wall mentioned, was a measure implemented during the Presidency of Bill Clinton by the United States Border Patrol, built up in 1994 under the name of Operation Gatekeeper which divides the borders of Mexico and the USA, so as to avoid the entrance of illegal immigrants from Mexico, as well as other Central American countries, or according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS): “the goal of Gatekeeper was to restore integrity and safety to the nation’s busiest border” (INS, 2019). It certainly represents a very strong symbol of segregation and death due to the increase of people who have died while trying to cross this brick frontier. Another physical barrier that separates families and violates human rights since September 2000 would be the Israeli West Bank barrier, erected by the Israeli government; according to them it is a security barrier against terrorism (Israel’s Security Fence, 2019), while Palestinians call it a racial segregation wall (Chomsky, 2004). Lastly, for most Spaniards Nicosia, capital city of Cyprus, is the best European example of a frontier dividing both the capital city as well as the country. The well-known Green Line separates Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities since the political conflicts that arouse after the country’s independence from Britain in 1960. These are only three examples of some physical and emotional barriers which prevent people from living together in an intercultural environment, albeit, unfortunately there are so many other walls built around our world. In this sense, these barriers represent frustration, an unreal defense and the lack of freedom. Why do we build walls that limit a rich and intercultural exchange among different backgrounds, races, and religions? Walls, fences, boundaries, and barriers should be destroyed in favor of bridges that connect people and their languages, cultures, habits and traditions – and the school’s role must be to support doing so.

This last reflection is the main goal of this paper: to destroy physical and intellectual elements that ban freedom to think, freedom of speech, freedom to meet the so-called others and to expand our perspectives through the use of Children’s Literature; since literature becomes an effective and striking tool to develop the breaking of these pitfalls in minds (Ballester, 1999; Ballester, 2011; Domene-Benito, 2017; Haba-Osca, 2017). While Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) say it best: “although education is extremely valuable and necessary, experience will always be the most powerful and effective way to learn and know”.

Children’s Literature that represents walls torn down and/or building bridges can be used as a tool for the representation of migratory movements and local cultural identities which have a great symbolic potential insofar as these themes narrate voices and experiences that represent the history of humankind. Through a cross-border narratological thread, this so-called Across the Borders Literature helps to shape an increasingly globalised world made up of liquid societies. Approached as a polyhedral construct, societies can prioritise certain narratives through literature and establish canons and patterns that quickly underpin and strengthen given social practices and power asymmetries. In such contexts, Children’s Literature serves as a vehicle that channels the language, culture, and identity of migrant experiences, and thus it

can help bridge communities or, on the other hand, contribute to further widening the gap between them. The study of Across the Borders Literature does not only concern language and literature studies but other areas of knowledge, such as geography, history, psychology, education, pedagogy and teacher training, among others.

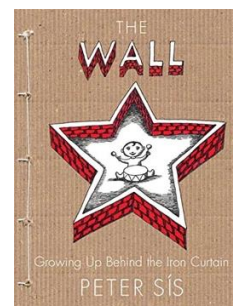
Hence, in order for this proposal of including Children's picture books that deal with Across the Borders Literature complex topics, relevant research must take place in order to implement methodological approaches and design tasks that encourage critical thinking among young and adult readers. Therefore, Elementary Schools and the university are idyllic spaces to apply critical pedagogy approaches that clearly connect with the process that search transformation by means of deep thinking and active citizenship.

### Methodology

The aim of our research is to discover stories that contain a real physical wall as a metaphorical main character. Our selection includes two slightly different segregation cases – a religious conflict and a political separation – two picture books: *Walking to School* (2008) by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Michael Dooling and Caldecott Honor Book, *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (2007) by Peter Sís (see Figure 1a and 1b). In the first story, readers can observe the hard way to go to school for a Catholic girl, named Allison, in Northern Ireland and, in the second one, the division of the 'Two Germanys' from Peter's, a child, point of view. Both protagonists have in common that they must cope with harsh challenges in a society in turmoil.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 1.** These are the covers of the picture books selected: (a) *Walking to School* (2008) by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Michael Dooling; (b) *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (2007) by Peter Sís.

As it can be observed, they are a strong example of cultural authenticity and diversity. That is, undoubtedly, one of the criteria used to select these picture books. In this line of thought, as Guevara (2003:9) puts it: “An authentic work is a work that feels alive; something true from the culture exists there and creates a connection between its creator and its reader”. In this respect, both creators manage to create a culturally conscious experience by using multicultural literature where little protagonists represent honesty, innocence and authenticity. Fleeing from adults' prejudices, these children listen to their hearts and act

according to what they think is right, pursuing thus their ideals. Therefore, these literary works present friendship, respect, tolerance, and social justice as universal and timeless themes. Each story provides the reader with a controversial situation and an in-depth reflection; they are filled with tears, sorrows and fences but also with smiles, joy and genuine gestures. Briefly, the combination of aspects such as devotion, passion, tolerance, and respect benefits the creation of an 'aesthetic' and authentic masterpiece which in this case legitimizes these children's experiences.

Therefore, authenticity, cultural legitimation and accuracy are three interesting and proper traits to consider *Walking to School* and *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* pertinent and attractive models for 21<sup>st</sup> century young readers all over the world. Thanks to this kind of proposals, children are able to understand different religious backgrounds and the role politics play in their daily life despite their early age.

Regarding the methodology followed by the participant lecturers in question, attempted to apply close-reading technique which is based in interpreting our own observations to promote inductive reasoning: moving from the observation of particular facts and details to a conclusion, or interpretation, based on those observations. According to Lluçh (2010), Colomer (2002) and Nikolajeva (2001) to these two picture books focusing mainly in five items: (i) the importance of the social-historical context; (ii) the role of the wall as a personified character in the story; (iii) the plot of the story; (iv) the main characters' reactions and thoughts throughout the story; and lastly, (v) the powerful meaning of the illustrations.

### **Findings**

In this section, the results of the close-reading technique analysis are described.

#### **Walking to School (2008)**

Regarding this picture book context, it is a story oriented to religious differences in Belfast, the capital city of Northern Ireland, particularly the location is in the 'Peace Lines' that divided Catholics and Protestants but still continues alive both in people's minds and streets. In Jack Sommers' words: "Segregation is less intense than it was around the time the first peace walls were built in 1969, when the British Army was sent in to Northern Ireland to keep the peace after rioting and began building temporary fences, but it persists" (2014). Via this quote, we realize how some people managed to consider a barrier like something to protect them and promotes our need to change people's minds to overthrow physical borders.

Hence, the 'Peace Line' in Belfast plays an essential role in *Walking to School* (2008). Dealing with the inspiration for the book, Eve Bunting remembers an event that happened some years ago and rewrites the story using fictional characters but creating a pretty realistic tale.

The main theme of this tale is the narration of an unpleasant situation during the 'Troubles' in Belfast – daily confrontations between Catholics and Protestants made even difficult a common daily routine such as going school for children. In this atmosphere, a wall becomes a personified character that separates and segregates children from different religious beliefs like Allison and the "mysterious" girl. The most complicated moment of the day occurs when Allison has to go to school through a Protestant neighbourhood. That barrier is not only

a physical force but also a mental one since adult people have it on their minds and they avoid children expressing themselves by using their own voice and decide about the future of the wall. In fact, in this picture book the author emphasizes that children do not understand the “problem” and start making silent questions that step by step become more “alive” queries.

Closely linked to this conception of the wall not as the “enemy” but probably as an opportunity of meeting new and different people in that neighbourhood, readers can find Allison. She is the main character of the book, a Catholic girl who “start wondering about Protestants and Catholics. Do they hate each other as much in other countries as they do here in Northern Ireland?” (2008:4). From the very beginning of the book, readers are capable of discovering why Allison doesn’t want to go to school, the religious problems affect her and she starts to question the reasons of these affairs. She is a very bright girl who is aware of the situation: “I’d seen those Protestants yesterday morning myself, in person” (2008: 13). At this point, this character cannot be understood without the influence of her initially idolized uncle. In this sense, Uncle Frank is another important character. The beloved uncle becomes a kind of religious evil for her niece when she is conscious about his religious fanaticism: “Liam Connors has got to be taught a lesson” (2008: 10) and when she hears that Liam had been hurt. Uncle Frank considers that Protestants are bad but Allison thinks that kind of actions from Catholic people should be also reprehensible: “But are we a bad lot, too?” (2008: 15).

These previous comments can be considered like the preliminaries to the climax of the story. After having breakfast, Allison, her mum and her uncle begin the hard way to school. Drummond is the negative image, the segregationist symbol, the barrier among people from the same city. Again, a new sign of maturity can be glimpsed in Allison when she thinks about little children: “I’m eight years old and I’ve heard some of those words before, but what about the little kids? Some of them are just four” (2008:21). However, everything is not as bad as it seems. The losing of a button from her blazer gives Allison the opportunity of checking that not all the Protestants are bad. A Protestant girl picks up her button from the floor and returns her. Nevertheless, adult world do not understand that children just only want to have fun and be friends with other children: “Get away from her, you dirty Protestant” (2008:26). As the story progresses, Allison and her new Protestant friend have to say goodbye due to religious confrontations. At this point, a friendship symbol becomes relevant. Allison, in a sign of gratefulness towards this girl, gives her a lucky tiger’s-eye marble. In this sense, although they cannot be friends they can remember each other. The resolution is clear. For the moment the adult world has won: “Getting friendly with the enemy!” (2008:29). Nevertheless, Allison does not surrender, first she doubts of her uncle’s ideas: “Who says she’s the enemy?” (2008:29), then at school when the teacher says that they, the Catholic, are Irish heroes and Allison reacts in this way:

*What is she talking about? I don’t feel like a hero. All I know is, I met a Protestant girl who was nice. She said she hated this fighting, and so do I. I think we could be friends, if we had the chance. I know we could. If the grownups would let us (2008: 31).*

This is the last reflection of this girl, a girl who starts to think in a critical way and despite the fact that she only mutters and she daren’t say it aloud she gives an important step to reconciliation. Adults should learn from her. In brief, thanks to Allison’s life lesson, children are able to start to think critically and not accept everything adults say. Ultimately, the



behaviour of this girl is a good example for children to try to mend racist, culture or racist struggles in their everyday life: at school, at home, at their neighbourhood.

Finally, regarding the five items to be analysed, the illustrations are essential to read between lines in an emotional way since the gestures and Allison's body languages expresses her own thoughts and beliefs. Furthermore, the cover is an anticipation of what the story is going to tell. A mother and a daughter seem to observe a difficult situation and they try to reflect and think in a critical way in order to look for possible solutions to a collective problem.

### **The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain (2007)**

Last November, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the demolition of probably the most famous wall in the world was held. Berlin Wall divided Germany in two (East and West) from 1961 to 1989. One country becomes two countries with different governments and laws, with prohibitions, with no freedom, with broken families. On the one side, West Germany, also known as Federal Republic of Germany was ruled by a parliamentary democracy based on a capitalist economic system. On the other side, East Germany, German Democratic Republic represents the ideals of Soviet Marxism. Definitely, an iron curtain was the protagonist in the life of millions of people who could not enjoy basic rights like the communication and the establishment of relationships among people from the same origins.

In *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (2007), Peter Sís recreates his childhood in the Communist Side. By using a metaphor inspiring in typical child's hobbies, drawing and painting, he takes a journey through Czechoslovakia's history. Moreover, it is noticeable the fact that despite mixing autobiographical and historical scenery, the author uses the personal pronoun 'he', maybe to tell the audience that this can be the history of many children who were born in Czechoslovakia in that period of time. In this line of thought, that history cannot be understood without the presence of a wall, in this case, not a physical like the Berlin one but a mental one. The wall is characterised by being a horror space where children have to face to the sound of tanks, guns and dictatorial speeches whose goal is to control their minds from their early childhood. This barrier represents hate, lack of freedom and the superiority of a dominant group.

In this case, the protagonist is the author itself using some fictional and universal traits that, as we have claimed before, can be applied to every single child living in a dictatorship. The main character is round since he changes his mind from childhood to adulthood by using drawing as an effective tool to fight against narrow-minded ideologies and lack of freedom to decide his own interests. It is interesting to follow his "life journey" through the progress of the plot.

Taking into account the structure of this picture book, as it has been highlighted previously, the historical component is essential (as it can be observed in the first introductory page) where the author retells the consequences of the Second World War, the period of Cold War and the Berlin Wall. Apart from words themselves, illustrations (a child's drawings) are the principal protagonist of this literary work. Actually, they are the main responsible of telling this child's story. Moreover, the author includes a section called 'From my journals' that can be interpreted as a kind of diary with symbolical dates. Following a circular structure, the book starts and finish in the same way, with an exhaustive historical description of that time; in the

beginning a general one and at the end a personal story. Furthermore, the drawings portray the passing of time, from a baby who draws things how they are told to an adult bearded-baby who continues drawing but also questions things around him.

So as to do a detailed analysis of this picture book, it can be divided into some parts. The first one reflects his early childhood marked by innocence, ingenuity and purity. Like the vast majority of children, he loves drawing, but at that time and in that place red and grey are the predominant colours to dye everyday things such as red flags on state holidays or communist symbols (2007:4) or Spartakiad (2007:6). Suddenly, the war breaks out and “he drew tanks” (2007:7) and “he drew wars” (2007:8). He tells that he didn’t make questions about the reason why they did certain things until he discovered that everything wasn’t as it had been told at home and at school (there were prohibited books and films, shortages, and a cruel division between the East and the North).

After this finding, colours changed and “slowly he started to question. He painted what he wanted to-in secret” (2007: 15). In this way, the Prague Spring of 1968 and music represents the breakthrough by adding colourful images and the illusion of being the Beatles and rock and long hair symbolizes the rupture with Socialism. All of this can be observed in pages 19-20 where the protagonist draws and paints cultural items from Western: art, poetry, theatre...

Nevertheless, August 21<sup>th</sup>, 1968 Czechoslovakia was invaded and again red and grey come back. For him, hope is vital and he expresses this feeling thorough a concert, an American concert to rescue him, a dream. The situation is even worse and censorship, discrimination and segregation take place in his daily life. To fight against them, he uses drawing to shape their desires of freedom. One of these dreams is the collapse of the Wall that divides the world in two metaphorical colours: a vivid one represents universal ideals like respect, pride, knowledge or equality and a grey and died one shows stupidity, corruption, envy or fear (2007: 44). Finally, the map of a reunited Europa and people destroying the wall symbolizes the accomplishment of this child’s -now an adult- desire “sometimes dreams come true. On November, 9, 1989, the Wall fell” (2007:45-46).

Although the vivid presence of illustrations has been referred when talking about the metaphors of the colours, it is necessary to underline its relevance since they offer the reader the possibility of reading the book in a visual way. Indeed, Peter’s story can be interpreted through images focused on the symbolism of those colours.

## Discussion

As we have expressed at the beginning of this paper, these two picture books have a physical wall as a central character. Whereas in the first one, *The Wall: growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*, the wall does not appear physically until the end of the book, in *Walking to School*, the barrier is present in the way to school. Despite these small differences, the wall represents the evil in both stories. In Czechoslovakia, the reminiscence of the physical Berlin Wall shows the separation of two worlds, the prohibition of Western things, the ban of books and films, the censorship of the Beatles and art in general. Definitely, the protagonist lives in a communist dictatorship where Western is considered as the most terrible enemy. Similarly, in Belfast, Allison’s uncle considers Protestants as dirty people. Nevertheless, the two children in both stories start to question why things are in that specific way and why they cannot change. Why people in Czechoslovakia cannot enjoy the Beatles? Why a Protestant girl cannot

be friend with a Catholic one in Belfast? Why not fall down these walls and build bridges? From different perspectives, one more autobiographical and another fictional based on real facts, these two literary works portray children's thoughts about racism, segregation and religious and social prejudice and how they react to these situations.

Like the vast majority of children's books, another of the similar points these narrations share is the fact of having a great deal of illustrations. Extremely important, in Peter Sís' tale pictures are even more relevant than words since they help children understand the historical facts and identify the colour differences with moods, repression, happiness, knowledge or equality. In contrast, in Bunting's work speeches are longer but illustrations also reflect Allison's feelings like surprise when she discovers the reality about her uncle (2008: 11), concern while she tries to arrive safe to school (2008:20) or happiness after meeting a good Protestant girl (2008:29).

Eventually, comparatively speaking, these two tales portray trouble times in Europe in recent times and how children have the willingness to get a harmonious and peaceful life without restrictions or segregation. Their desire is to destroy these physical barriers but also the intellectual and emotional ones. For example, in Allison's case, she feels very frustrated by being aware of her uncle's wall, a wall in his mind. For the boy in *The Wall* government and people who accept that situation without revealing in a pacific way have also mind fences. This situation can be applied to current society. The rejection of different cultures, languages or customs remains today where the Others are considered minor figures. In this regard, in a globalised world children have to coexist with children from different cultures, religions and cultures and try to destroy these imaginary but real walls.

In conclusion, when reading these picture books, children learn history but the most important, they are aware of the harsh reality of these children and how they fight to overcome difficulties using, in Peter's case, drawing as a protected and challenging resource and, in Allison's one, her powerful mind. By reading these two picture books, young readers can be aware of historical facts that change our world and how children are able to imagine and think in a critical way to get their goals. Allison starts thinking about a real friendship with a Protestant girl and Peter changes, little by little, his mind in order to do what he makes him happy.

This is the message that Peter Sís and Eve Bunting want to show to children, the urgent necessity of thinking critically and go beyond. By means of their literary works, they rewrite some remarkable events in recent history. Although these could be conflictive themes and traditionally addressed to adults, today we can find works like Sís and Bunting's ones for children and with children's perspective that explore the existence of racism, prejudice and segregation and the power of friendship to overcome these difficulties. In this sense, children's literature can be used as a powerful tool to approach these topics and reflect on the existence of these barriers. Why was it necessary to cut this great city in two, disfiguring not only its streets, but also the life and the fate of its inhabitants?

### **Walking to School and The Wall: Growing up behind the iron curtain from a didactic and pedagogical approach**

In the first place, it is necessary to specify what the audience of this didactic proposal is. In this regard, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year-old children will be the main recipients of these activities and tasks. It is worth highlighting that they are non-native English speakers. As a consequence, the guideline will be designed taking into account that they are addressed to EFL young students. As it has already been mentioned along this paper, literature plays a crucial role not only in academic issues but also in personal ones. For this reason, the main objectives of this didactic proposal will be as follows:

- To increase cultural awareness among EFL students
- To promote critical thinking through close-reading and reading aloud techniques
- To foster collaborative team group
- To respect others' opinions and feelings
- To feel empathy towards the characters of the stories
- To learn English as a foreign language through literature (text plus image)
- To promote creative writing
- To develop oral and "acting" skills

After the specification of the main goals of this proposal, a detailed description of some activities and tasks divided into sessions is presented:

**Table 1.** Description of the sessions and their contents

Session	Contents
Session 1: <i>Walking to School I</i>	Reading (page 1-23)
Session 2: <i>Walking to School II</i>	Reading (page until the end)
Session 3: <i>Walking to School</i> from a theatrical perspective	Theatre as a way of expression
Session 4: <i>The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain I</i>	Reading (from the beginning to the irruption of the Beatles)
Session 5: <i>The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain II</i>	Reading (from the irruption of the Beatles until the end)
Session 6: A hobby, a safe passage to freedom	Describe a hobby and explain how this hobby makes students' life better

As it can be appreciated on the table above, there are two different sessions dedicated to each story where the main element is providing young EFL students with a detailed reading and debate on controversial issues.

In this way, in the first session about *Walking to School*, teachers try to approach the story to EFL students using images as a powerful ally to follow the plot. In this part of the tale, students meet Allison, the main protagonist and how her feelings, thoughts and opinions change while thinking in a critical way. Thus, teachers' main challenge will be to make children identify with Allison and apply her teachings to their own lives. During the reading

aloud process, teachers must encourage children to make questions and express their own feelings and opinions. At this point, they start thinking in a critical way and learn how to respect others' contributions.

The second session starts during a climax point when Allison meets the Other girl, a girl who is different from her but also similar, a girl who prays in a different way but smile in a cognate one. This is the moral message children can learn by reading this controversial story. Some questions teachers can make are the following ones:

- Can two children from different religions become friends?
- What is a hero? Why does Allison not consider her as a hero?
- What is more difficult to overcome? A physical or a mind wall?

Finally, in the third session, teachers propose the creation of a theatre performance in order to get students engaged with the story and the characters. By pairs, students prepare a sort of dialogue between Allison and her new friend where they write about the beginning of an intercultural friendship. Once they have finished their dialogues, they can opt for performing their works in front of the class.

The fourth session will be the first dedicated to *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. Following the same work guidelines, teachers emphasize a close and deep reading and in this case the study and interpretation of images prevail in a remarkable way. In the first part of this story, children realize about the importance of politics during early childhood and adolescence and how a hobby (drawing) can help them to overcome difficulties.

The fifth session starts with the irruption of the Beatles and a colourful world. In this sense, teachers focus on the chromatic meaning of the story and the function colours play on it. These could be some sample questions to arise the debate among students and teachers:

- Do you know the Beatles? What is your favourite kind of music?
- Why do you think there is a colour change?
- Why the historical context is important?

In the last and sixth session, students will have to show their critical understanding of the story through the persistence of their dreams. In this sense, teachers show the images that start and finish the story (scan) and suggest students to reflect about them and apply to their own lives.

To carry out this task, they need to choose a hobby and portray it in an interdisciplinary way (by means of a written description and/or a drawing) and explain in which way it makes their life better and help them to overcome difficult times and situations. Therefore, the main purpose of this task is to get children involved with the story through their own personal experiences. Thus, they will be able to internalize the story critically and adapt the moral messages to their own realities.

To conclude this section, it could be affirmed that 21st century young readers need and deserve diverse books where every single child has the opportunity of seeing reflected his/her own cultural upbringing. As this paper has shown, having books where diversity and cultural authenticity are two essential pillars provides children with different perspectives and promotes their imagination and critical thinking. Furthermore, through Allison and Peter's

examples, children explore controversial but current themes such as political discrimination and religious confrontations.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Children's Literature represents an effective tool to go further in the destruction of physical and mental walls so as to promote the construction of fraternal bridges and paths where diversity is the main protagonist. Like Allison and Peter, all children in the world must discover their own internal side, accept and value it in order to be aware of the existence of the Others and start an intercultural relationship with enrichment for both parts. Why cannot adapt these stories to real life? This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge: fostering multicultural awareness among children through education and experience, through identification, through going beyond graphic symbols, through literature.

We claim a public school as a crucial space to welcome this urgent commitment. Especially in a moment of advance of reactionary and ultraconservative drifts with which xenophobic, macho, homophobic speeches are propagated... and with which you want to impose a cultural story with which to justify the wars, conflicts and invasions that serve to their interests.

Thus, it is vital that teaching and research focus on the production of relevant knowledge for social change, attached to their reality of their time and that in response to contemporary problems, criteria that, as we well know, do not. They are the ones who inform the idea of academic excellence. However, contributing to disrupt the logic of this story and build an emancipatory cultural horizon is the main challenge of a school and university committed to life.

From a critical position it is essential to question the positivist scientific model that defends the neutrality, objectivity and scientific rationality and, which prevents recognizing the value of the knowledge that comes from the popular, traditional culture, of women, of peasants, of non-western cultures and raising voice to the unvoiced. The characteristic eurocentrism that settles the superiority of this look reflects the colonialist historical past that we have not just eradicated. Nor have we yet eliminated the androcentrism that permeates the production of knowledge and that has been historically denounced by critical pedagogy and Feminist academies, among others.

Opening the school to other narratives built from other subjects and latitudes will be, undoubtedly, a great contribution to combat eurocentrism, androcentrism and to promote the process of decolonization of the collective imaginary and the knowledge produced. The decolonial perspective and the Southern epistemologies offer very suggestive proposals to value the knowledge of alternative groups and make viable their desires to build a world liberated from domination models. It is therefore appropriate to open the doors of the schools, public libraries and state universities, to give way to these social groups and to promote research spaces where awareness of our position as critical subjects and the horizon of social transformation constitute central elements of university work.

All of these views and speeches have begun to appear shyly in the school thanks to the effort of different critical subjects – teachers, students, researchers, as well as other educational and social agents. It would be very interesting to give continuity to these initiatives and for those who are responsible for designing and developing educational policies to accommodate

these emancipatory approaches, in order to guide future teachers, educators and tutors, the public good and commitment to life.

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