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Editor

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LITERATURA Y MÉTODO DOCENTE

THE USE OF DIFFERENT GENRES OF LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSES

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Literature in EFL classes

The growing influence of English and any other foreign language in the context of globalization has resulted in a growing interest in finding the most suitable techniques and strategies that contribute to the acquisition of a foreign language.

Along with the traditional methods, linguists and researchers have made use of alternative methods to teaching. Recent researches have stressed the importance of literature as a tool to improve not only the linguistic skills but also to make students feel more confident when using language in real contexts.

Researchers use different arguments to support their views on the integration of literature in EFL teaching and learning. We can summarize some of them as follows:

Teaching literature enables students "to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows"¹

Literary texts provide examples of language resources being used to the full, and the reader is placed in an active interactional role in working with and making sense of this language².

Literary texts are not created for the specific purpose of teaching but they mainly deal with "things which matter to the author when he wrote them"³.

¹ Carter, R., and Long, M. *Teaching Literature*. Essex, Longman.1991, pág 2.

² Brumfit, C.J. and Carter, R.A. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press. 1986, pág 15.

³ Maley, A. "Down from the Pedestal: Literature as Resource" in *Literature and the Learner: Methodological Approaches*. Cambridge, Modern English Publications.1989, pág 12.

The article will consider the different literary genres and how they fit within the context of foreign language teaching, such as the use of poetry and drama, and more specifically we will focus on the use of the short story as an effective way of choosing not only the right material but also the appropriate technique to infuse the necessary linguistic skills. Whereas with regard to novels, it is not the focus of this article, since a teacher may make use of different techniques and classroom settings. However, novels can be used in discourse analysis, where students are advised to make use of a dictionary so that they can enrich their vocabulary and increase their reading speed.

Another genre successfully used in EFL classrooms is poetry. The only concern with poetry is that students should be taught from the beginning to examine the deep structure and to make sure that they infer the implied meaning.

The use of drama in EFL classes gives students the opportunity to work as a team, develops and express their ideas freely and become more confident in foreign language learning. While using drama, students actively participate and become more motivated to learn. The class becomes more fun and relaxed and students are more prone to overcoming the fear of interacting in another language and become more fluent in speaking. The use of drama also helps students develop and enhance organizational and presentation skills. More importantly, it helps them to build self-esteem and the sense of responsibility they will be using throughout their life in different real life situations. Drama and other literary genres bring the real world situations and create opportunities to students to run away from reality and hide in some other place as a different person.

Earl Stevick states that, language learning must appeal to the creative intuitive aspect of personality as well as the conscious and rational part⁴. Perego and Boyle stated "Drama activities provide students with a variety of contextualized and scaffold activities that gradually involve more participation and more oral language proficiency, they are also non-threatening and a lot of fun⁵. Kao and O, Neill propose that confidence levels increase when students have something to talk about and, most importantly, when they know how to express their ideas.⁶

Moreover, the different literary genres that teachers of English can make use of provide them not only with valuable linguistic material to teach the basic four skills

⁴ Stevick, F. *Teaching Languages: Away and ways*. Rowley, MA, Newbury house. 1980.

⁵ Perego and Boyle. *Using Drama and movement to enhance English Language Learners' Literacy development*, 2008. < <http://business.highbeam.com/6137/article-1G1-204682056/using-drama-and-movement-enhance-english-language-learners>> [Retrieved: 27/4/2012].

⁶ Kao, S. M., O' Neill, C. *Words into Worlds: Learning a second language Through Process Drama*. Stamford, London, Abbex, 1998.

but also with materials that may stimulate discussions and debate among students. Particularly, the events and characters in a poem, drama, novel or short story may be interesting topics to discuss or to role play.

Lately, with the means of technology, teachers are bringing literary texts alive through their adaptations in videos and audio versions. Another method that teachers encourage students to read the stories is by using the abridged versions, depending on the class level and student's individual abilities.

The following section will deal more precisely with the effective use of short stories in EFL teaching.

Teaching Short stories in EFL

The reason why the short story is the literary genre mostly used in classroom, is that students favor this genre most as compared to the other alternatives available to them. One of the factors influencing this decision may be that the contents of the novel, poetry and drama are more difficult to assimilate because even the way we read them is different from the short story. The short story is also identified as simple and less complex than the other reading of literature courses.

In this context there are several advantages of using short stories in EFT:

- Teaching culture
- Reinforcing skills
- Motivation

Teaching culture

Humboldt's idea about language was that it influenced our point of view. He claimed that language is a closed circle and in order to learn another language we need to jump from this circle to another one and in this way we change our attitudes towards life. By making a comparison with literature, we can say that literature similarly provides us with the opportunity to learn about another culture.

Teaching literature enables students "to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows"⁷.

⁷ Carter, R., and Long, M. *Teaching Literature*. Essex, Longman, 1991. pág. 2.

Furthermore, literature deals with universal concepts that are common to all languages and cultures such as love, hatred, death, nature that are common to all languages and cultures.⁸

A foreign language is a means to enhance our communication with another culture. Under the global context there is a growing need for shared understanding among nations.

Reinforcing skills

An efficient acquisition of the basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) is best achieved in a natural learning environment. Artificial classrooms where the teacher and students are obliged to follow some strict scenarios have not proved to be a successful way of learning a foreign language.

Nowadays the real-life contexts have become a must in our teaching experience. Literature, particularly, plays an important role in this aspect. The introduction of short stories while teaching, influences the development of the language skill of reading. It is a valuable material, short and close to real life. On the other hand, it also develops the skill of speaking, where students are encouraged not only to discuss about its theme and characters but they can also be organized to bring the short story as a role-play among themselves. One of the objectives of the class could not only be to read and understand the text, on the contrary, students try to understand individual words but they try to grasp the deep structure of the text.

Listening and writing skills may also be reinforced either by bringing to class an audio version of the short story or by watching a DVD, in those cases where there is a film adaption of the story. Moreover, students may be encouraged to write a short story themselves or different activities may be used such as: describing the characters, the setting or writer's point of view.

Motivation

Enhancing student's motivation is the goal of every foreign language teacher. A foreign language in itself consists of elements that motivate a student; however, combining it with the right strategies can contribute better to language acquisition.

Motivation can be better increased when using authentic materials. When you bring to class literary texts students are provided with the opportunity to read life stories, events and characters. They are more exposed to a foreign culture and together with linguistic skills; they learn and get more information about cultural elements.

⁸ Maley. *Down from the pedestal: Literature as resource*. In R. Carter, R. Walker & C. Brumfit(eds.) *Literature and the learner: methodological approaches*. Modern English Publications and the British Council. 1989, págs. 1-9.

Thus, students are thrown into the real social context of that language, which they find more enjoyable.

In the context of EFL learning, Littlewood observes that "In second language learning as in every other field of human learning, motivation is the critical force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it, and how long he perseveres. It is a complex phenomenon and includes many components: the individual drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity, desire for stimulation and new experience and so on. These factors play a role in every kind of learning situation"⁹.

Practical overview of the use of short stories in EFL classes

Arioğul has elaborated in the following advantages in terms of integrating short stories in the curriculum designed for EFL¹⁰. According to him, the short story

- makes the students' reading task easier due to being simple and short when compared with the other literary genres,
- enlarges the advanced level readers' world views about different cultures and different groups of people,
- provides more creative, encrypt, challenging texts that require personal exploration supported with prior knowledge for advanced level readers,
- motivates learners to read due to being an authentic material,
- offers a world of wonders and a world of mystery,
- gives students the chance to use their creativity,
- promotes critical thinking skills,
- facilitates teaching a foreign culture (i.e. serves as a valuable instrument in attaining cultural knowledge of the selected community,
- makes students feel themselves comfortable and free,
- helps students coming from various backgrounds to communicate with each other because of its universal language,
- helps students to go beyond the surface meaning and dive into underlying meanings, and
- acts as a perfect vehicle to help students understand the positions of themselves as well as the others by transferring these gained knowledge to their own world.

⁹ Littlewood, William. *Foreign and Second Language Learning: Language Acquisition Research and Its Implications for the Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1987, pág. 53

¹⁰ Arioğul, S. *The Teaching of Reading Through Short Stories in Advanced Classes*. Unpublished M.A Thesis. Ankara, Hacettepe University, 2001, págs. 11-18

To practically support the above mentioned advantages on the benefits of the short stories we will illustrate with a lesson plan carried out with first year students. This lesson plan details all steps a teacher may use when integrating literature as a linguistic material.

Lesson Plan (English through Fiction)

Story title: The Storm (by Kate Chopin)

Course: I (level of English proficiency: upper intermediate)

Objectives

- a. To analyze the story using specific techniques and terms designed to understand and probe the text in order to identify the story's setting.
- b. To analyze selections of the story "The Storm" specifically in relation to literary elements explained before: elements of plot and point of view.
- c. To identify important vocabulary, specifically words that are new to students and to use context clues to explain those words.

Materials: Copies of the complete story (students), copies of selections (students), background information about author and her writing (teacher)

Warm Up: (3-5 minutes)

The storm: have students brainstorm what characterizes the storm and keep the ideas for the discussion.

Step One: Lesson Structure (10 minutes)

Explain the aims of the activities, that is, to identify the story's setting, plot elements and point of view. Check if any of the students has information about the author and place and time she wrote at. Give students some background information about the kind of writing the author does and her most frequent themes. Explain the use of *foreignisms* (in this case French words).

Step Three: Group work (15 minutes)

Set students in groups (4 groups) and assign roles in the group (e.g. the scribe, the presenter, and the vocabulary picker). Each group is given a selection of the story and required to find details that lead to understanding the elements of plot, point of view and setting. In addition, students are required to pick 5 words that are new to them and that seem to be important in the selection they have. They are asked to define the words using context clues.

Step Four: Presentation (20 minutes)

Each group presents what they have prepared in turns, starting with the literary elements and ending with vocabulary.

Step Five: Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Using the information brought by each group, the whole class concludes about the elements of the plot, the point of view and specifically the setting. Students and teacher try to find the multiple meanings in the title "The Storm" making use of the characteristics of the storm discussed at the beginning of the class. Students and teacher go over vocabulary that was new and explain by thinking of possible situations students can illustrate from their own life and experience.

After this activity, we observed that students encountered not only difficulties concerning certain literary aspect of the text but even vocabulary problems due to their proficiency level. The vocabulary difficulties were also a result of the cultural and historical differences and the cultural interpretation they gave specific parts of the story, especially the part entailing the whole idea of the story. Albanian students interpreted as a marital betrayal what Chopin intended to bring as an ironic fulfillment.

"They did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms. She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon. Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world. The generous abundance of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached."

During this class students were given the opportunity to work in groups and take roles which helped them interacting with each other and practicing the language.

Selection of class materials

After having analyzed the benefits and main reasons that teachers make use of the short story during their teaching experience and bringing this theory into the real context where a group of our students found these techniques as beneficial we should also be aware of the main elements that may jeopardize our essential goals; we are referring here to the material that we are going to bring to the class.

When choosing the appropriate material we should carefully consider several criteria like the level of proficiency of the students, their age and interest as well as

the relevance to the course objectives. Short stories can be used in EFL classes in different levels of proficiency, for both young and adult learners. The teacher should choose a short story that is appropriate and will help students in their foreign language learning.

When using short stories in their classes both teachers and students are given the opportunity to integrate all linguistic skills. Murdoch indicates that "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners at intermediate levels of proficiency".¹¹

In addition, Spack suggests the aspect of interest to be considered. It is of great importance to the teacher to choose literary texts that could arouse the interest of the students and most probably those stories which are presented in a visual form.¹² McKay and Rivers point out that students read and enjoy a text if the subject-matter of the text is relevant to their life experience and interests¹³. The literary texts usually have a strong impact on the readers, thus providing them with linguistic competence and cultural and historical awareness. Teachers have to choose literary texts which have a simple language and which makes it easier for students to comprehend. Comprehension is only a part of the large umbrella including interest, appeal and relevance.

Enjoyment; a fresh insight into issues felt to be related to the heart of people's concerns; the pleasure of encountering one's own thoughts or situations exemplified clearly in a work of art; the other, equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective: all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material.¹⁴

Conclusion

The use of different literary genres in EFL classes is important because it provides students with linguistic and cultural information; it helps them to interact with other students in a foreign language and it is a good opportunity for them to enhance their knowledge and vocabulary. The short story, one of the mostly used literary

¹¹ Murdoch, G. "Exploiting well-known short stories for language skills development", IATEFL LCS SIG Newsletter 23, 2002, págs. 9-17.

¹² Spack, R. "Literature, Reading, Writing, and ESL: Bridging the Gaps." TESOL Quarterly, 19, 1985, págs. 703-725.

¹³ Rivers, Wilga. *Teaching foreign-language skill*. Chicago, CUP. 1968, pág. 230. McKay, Sandra Lee. *Literature as Content for ESL/EFL*. Ed. Marianne Celce-Murcia, 2001, pág. 322.

¹⁴ Collie, J. and S. Slater. *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge, CUP. 1990, págs. 6-7.

genres in EFL classes, is simpler and less complex than the other readings in literature courses.

Short stories, when used in EFL classes, have a strong cultural impact on students and increase their motivation. All linguistic skills are being reinforced and classes become more pleasurable to students.

Along with the benefits of using short stories and other literary genres in EFL teaching and learning, the choosing of an appropriate material to use is of great importance. It is the teacher's duty to choose a material appropriate to the preparation, age, cultural background, linguistic skills and motivation of students.

Short stories can be used in EFL classes in different levels of proficiency, for both young and adult learners. The teacher should choose a short story that is appropriate and will help students in their foreign language learning.

The integration of different literary genres in EFL classes, prepares students to use a number of skills necessary not only when learning a language. It helps them develop critical thinking and analytical skills. Literature helps them to learn how to formulate and express independent opinions, to broaden their horizons and they are provided with the opportunity to understand other cultures. When literary texts are used in class, they provide students with an opportunity to entertain themselves, encourage creativity and originality and develop their attitudes toward the real world outside the classroom as well.

Appendix

"The Storm" was written by Kate Chopin on July 19, 1898. The short story was first published in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* in 1969. The story is set in the late nineteenth century at Friedheimer's store in Louisiana, and at the nearby house of Calixta and Bobinôt.

The Storm

I

The leaves were so still that even Bibi thought it was going to rain. Bobinôt, who was accustomed to converse on terms of perfect equality with his little son, called the child's attention to certain sombre clouds that were rolling with sinister intention from the west, accompanied by a sullen, threatening roar. They were at Friedheimer's store and decided to remain there till the storm had passed. They sat within the door on two empty kegs. Bibi was four years old and looked very wise.

"Mama'll be 'fraid, yes, he suggested with blinking eyes.

"She'll shut the house. Maybe she got Sylvie helpin' her this evenin'," Bobinôt responded reassuringly.

"No; she ent got Sylvie. Sylvie was helpin' her yistiday,' piped Bibi.

Bobinôt arose and going across to the counter purchased a can of shrimps, of which Calixta was very fond. Then he returned to his perch on the keg and sat stolidly holding the can of shrimps while the storm burst. It shook the wooden store and seemed to be ripping great furrows in the distant field. Bibi laid his little hand on his father's knee and was not afraid.

II

Calixta, at home, felt no uneasiness for their safety. She sat at a side window sewing furiously on a sewing machine. She was greatly occupied and did not notice the approaching storm. But she felt very warm and often stopped to mop her face on which the perspiration gathered in beads. She unfastened her white sacque at the throat. It began to grow dark, and suddenly realizing the situation she got up hurriedly and went about closing windows and doors.

Out on the small front gallery she had hung Bobinôt's Sunday clothes to dry and she hastened out to gather them before the rain fell. As she stepped outside, Alcée Laballière rode in at the gate. She had not seen him very often since her marriage, and never alone. She stood there with Bobinôt's coat in her hands, and the big rain drops began to fall. Alcée rode his horse under the shelter of a side projection where the chickens had huddled and there were plows and a harrow piled up in the corner.

"May I come and wait on your gallery till the storm is over, Calixta?" he asked. Come 'long in, M'sieur Alcée."

His voice and her own startled her as if from a trance, and she seized Bobinôt's vest. Alcée, mounting to the porch, grabbed the trousers and snatched Bibi's braided jacket that was about to be carried away by a sudden gust of wind. He expressed an intention to remain outside, but it was soon apparent that he might as well have been out in the open: the water beat in upon the boards in driving sheets, and he went inside, closing the door after him. It was even necessary to put something beneath the door to keep the water out.

"My! what a rain! It's good two years sence it rain' like that," exclaimed Calixta as she rolled up a piece of bagging and Alcée helped her to thrust it beneath the crack.

She was a little fuller of figure than five years before when she married; but she had lost nothing of her vivacity. Her blue eyes still retained their melting quality;

and her yellow hair, disheveled by the wind and rain, kinked more stubbornly than ever about her ears and temples.

The rain beat upon the low, shingled roof with a force and clatter that threatened to break an entrance and deluge them there. They were in the dining room—the sitting room—the general utility room. Adjoining was her bed room, with Bibi's couch along side her own. The door stood open, and the room with its white, monumental bed, its closed shutters, looked dim and mysterious.

Alcée flung himself into a rocker and Calixta nervously began to gather up from the floor the lengths of a cotton sheet which she had been sewing.

If this keeps up, Dieu sait if the levees goin' to stan it!" she exclaimed.

"What have you got to do with the levees?"

"I got enough to do! An' there's Bobinôt with Bibi out in that storm—if he only didn' left Friedheimer's!"

"Let us hope, Calixta, that Bobinôt's got sense enough to come in out of a cyclone." She went and stood at the window with a greatly disturbed look on her face. She wiped the frame that was clouded with moisture. It was stiflingly hot. Alcée got up and joined her at the window, looking over her shoulder. The rain was coming down in sheets obscuring the view of far-off cabins and enveloping the distant wood in a gray mist. The playing of the lightning was incessant. A bolt struck a tall chinaberry tree at the edge of the field. It filled all visible space with a blinding glare and the crash seemed to invade the very boards they stood upon.

Calixta put her hands to her eyes, and with a cry, staggered backward. Alcée's arm encircled her, and for an instant he drew her close and spasmodically to him. "Bonté!" she cried, releasing herself from his encircling arm and retreating from the window, the house'll go next! If I only knew w'ere Bibi was!" She would not compose herself; she would not be seated. Alcée clasped her shoulders and looked into her face. The contact of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh.

"Calixta," he said, "don't be frightened. Nothing can happen. The house is too low to be struck, with so many tall trees standing about. There! aren't you going to be quiet? say, aren't you?" He pushed her hair back from her face that was warm and steaming. Her lips were as red and moist as pomegranate seed. Her white neck and a glimpse of her full, firm bosom disturbed him powerfully. As she glanced up at him the fear in her liquid blue eyes had given place to a drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire. He looked down into her eyes and there

was nothing for him to do but to gather her lips in a kiss. It reminded him of Assumption.

"Do you remember—in Assumption, Calixta?" he asked in a low voice broken by passion. Oh! she remembered; for in Assumption he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her; until his senses would well nigh fail, and to save her he would resort to a desperate flight. If she was not an immaculate dove in those days, she was still inviolate; a passionate creature whose very defenselessness had made her defense, against which his honor forbade him to prevail. Now—well, now—her lips seemed in a manner free to be tasted, as well as her round, white throat and her whiter breasts.

They did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms. She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon. Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world.

The generous abundance of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached.

When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life's mystery.

He stayed cushioned upon her, breathless, dazed, enervated, with his heart beating like a hammer upon her. With one hand she clasped his head, her lips lightly touching his forehead. The other hand stroked with a soothing rhythm his muscular shoulders.

The growl of the thunder was distant and passing away. The rain beat softly upon the shingles, inviting them to drowsiness and sleep. But they dared not yield.

III

The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery, watched Alcée ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud. Bobinôt and Bibi, trudging home, stopped without at the cistern to make themselves presentable.

"My! Bibi, w'at will yo' mama say! You ought to be ashame'. You oughta' put on those good pants. Look at 'em! An' that mud on yo' collar! How you got that mud on yo' collar, Bibi? I never saw such a boy!" Bibi was the picture of pathetic resignation. Bobinôt was the embodiment of serious solicitude as he strove to

remove from his own person and his son's the signs of their tramp over heavy roads and through wet fields. He scraped the mud off Bibi's bare legs and feet with a stick and carefully removed all traces from his heavy brogans. Then, prepared for the worst—the meeting with an over-scrupulous housewife, they entered cautiously at the back door.

Calixta was preparing supper. She had set the table and was dripping coffee at the hearth. She sprang up as they came in.

"Oh, Bobinôt! You back! My! but I was uneasy. W'ere you been during the rain? An' Bibi? he ain't wet? he ain't hurt?" She had clasped Bibi and was kissing him effusively. Bobinôt's explanations and apologies which he had been composing all along the way, died on his lips as Calixta felt him to see if he were dry, and seemed to express nothing but satisfaction at their safe return.

"I brought you some shrimps, Calixta," offered Bobinôt, hauling the can from his ample side pocket and laying it on the table. "Shrimps! Oh, Bobinôt! you too good fo' anything!" and she gave him a smacking kiss on the cheek that resounded, "J'vous répons, we'll have a feas' to-night! umph-umph!"

Bobinôt and Bibi began to relax and enjoy themselves, and when the three seated themselves at table they laughed much and so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballière's.

IV

Alcée Laballière wrote to his wife, Clarisse, that night. It was a loving letter, full of tender solicitude. He told her not to hurry back, but if she and the babies liked it at Biloxi, to stay a month longer. He was getting on nicely; and though he missed them, he was willing to bear the separation a while longer—realizing that their health and pleasure were the first things to be considered.

V

As for Clarisse, she was charmed upon receiving her husband's letter. She and the babies were doing well. The society was agreeable; many of her old friends and acquaintances were at the bay. And the first free breath since her marriage seemed to restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days. Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while. So the storm passed and every one was happy.¹⁵

¹⁵ The "Storm" by Kate Chopin. Retrieved April 15, 2012 from http://wps.ablongman.com/long_longman_mylitlabdemo_1/24/6276/1606831.cw/index.html