

A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR USING POETRY IN THE ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: The following essay aims to invite English as a foreign or second language teachers to include poetry in their classes as an alternative technique that might cause a positive impact in their students' linguistic and personal development thanks to all the opportunities that using poetry provides over other Literary genres, which are explained throughout this text. This article provides a theoretical framework based on literature review in which concepts such as the nature of poetry, poetry as expressive pedagogy, methodological approaches and literature in the EFL classroom such as the cultural, language and personal growth approach are thoroughly explained. Besides, this article targets to provide teachers with easy to follow steps that they can pursue as to successfully bring poetry and literature into their classrooms; how to select literature together with some simple ideas and examples of successful practices are available for the reader as to feel inspired and start bringing poetry and literature into their teaching context.

KEYWORDS: English as a Foreign Language, Poetry, Literature, Methodology.

UNA PROPUESTA METODOLÓGICA PARA USAR LA POESÍA EN LA SALA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

RESUMEN: *El siguiente ensayo tiene como objetivo invitar a profesores de inglés como segunda lengua o extranjera a incluir poesía en sus clases como una técnica alternativa que podría causar un impacto positivo tanto en el desarrollo lingüístico como personal de sus estudiantes, gracias a las oportunidades que entrega el uso de la misma por sobre otros géneros literarios, las cuales son explicadas a lo largo del texto. Este artículo entrega un marco teórico basado en revisión de literatura de conceptos como la naturaleza de la poesía, la poesía como pedagogía expresiva, enfoques metodológicos y literatura en la sala EFL tales como el enfoque cultural, lingüístico y de crecimiento personal son explicados. Además, este artículo apunta entregar pasos fáciles de seguir para profesores que deseen incluir la poesía y literatura de forma exitosa en sus aulas de clases; cómo seleccionar literatura, en conjunto con simples ideas y ejemplos de prácticas exitosas se ponen a disposición*

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del lector para hacerlo sentir inspirado y comenzar a incluir la poesía y la literatura en sus contextos pedagógicos.

PALABRAS CLAVES: EFL, Poesía, Literatura, Metodología

'A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom'.

Robert Frost.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that many teachers of English as a Foreign Language are generally eager readers, it is of considerable difficulty for them to find suitable texts and to design appropriate and related activities for use in the EFL¹ classroom. According to a study conducted in Spain by Fernández (2014), just eight out of the 79 English teachers investigated had included poetry in their lessons. According to Fernández (ibid) and after having interviewed 79 subjects, this is mainly caused because teachers assume that their students will not be interested in poems as they might find them dull or of extreme difficulty. Another study, conducted in Colombia by Gómez (2018) discovered that EFL education in Colombia has not been the exception to this reality of leaving poetry aside as most Colombian EFL teachers “tend to focus on developing language competence through communicative text books and grammar books that gradually present linguistic forms and communicative functions in an orderly fashion” (p.357).

Perhaps this lean result it is also related to the fact that workbooks do not include examples of these narrative styles and are generally lacking in the methodology required by teachers when working with poetry. Let us take the example of the books provided by the Ministry of Education in Chile to be used in the English classes. These are provided to every public and semi-public school in Chile and are free of charge for families. Herrada et al. (2012) claim that these books are of poor quality, unchallenging, not engaging and fail to promote critical thinking and give precedence to exercises focused on grammar, rather than additional skills more related to the personal growth of students. In addition, these books lack any type of exercise in which discussions can take place. As such, there is little reinforcement of skills relating to inferring, reflecting, thinking, analysing or forming opinions. This is why, as teachers, we need to find other resources as to benefit our students being the inclusion of poetry one of those.

Poetry has a great amount to contribute and can be a very positive element when introduced within the EFL classroom. As Panavelil (2011) claims, one of the prerequisites for language learning is a rich experience of language in use which is available in teaching poetry. Some benefits of using poetry in the EFL classroom are related to the use of a valuable resource to introduce and practice language by exposing students to “authentic models-real language in context” (Brumfit & Carter, 1987 in

¹ English as a Foreign Language.

Panavelil, 2011 p. 12). According to Tomlinson (1989) using poetry contributes far more to the development of language skills in real contexts than “a total concentration on the presentation and the practice of language items”(p.42). Another relevant advantage from poetry has to do with, in Lazar’s words (2007) the opportunity that a poem provides to students as to enrich their L2 vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context, which can be used and remembered easily. Another positive trait is that teachers can easily access poetry online, where there are a number of excellent websites available, this provides an opportunity to find poems in diverse formats beyond the printed copy of it; multimedia platforms, audio-visual material and more. However, it is of extreme relevance to select the appropriate material as to achieve a successful experience. For this to be done, the teacher should bear in mind students’ needs, age, context, interests, cultural background, differences and similarities. I think that it is also important to choose a poem that has a length and level of difficulty that would be suitable for the class in which it will be used.

This accessibility of poetry also provides teachers with an opportunity to interconnect different topics discussed in poems with workbook content or course syllabus. This might increase students’ motivation towards learning English as the connection between poems read in classes with contents from the workbook or syllabus would resonate with the student reader; while promoting discussion between classmates using the target language. As students will find themselves defending their own points of view in a language that it is not their native, their motivation levels might increase.

Furthermore, poetry is not as foreign to students as some might think. For example, nursery rhymes and songs learnt by students in their mother tongue provide an excellent starting point for teachers. Even though, according to Lazar (2007) there are three main literature genres available; prose-fiction, poetry and drama, this essay selects poetry over the other two because most poetry with or without intention uses metaphor as one of its principal traits offering a noteworthy learning process (Collie & Slater, 1990). While reading a poem, students will have to analyse its different components while developing sensitivity towards words and as Hall (2003) claims, developing different strategies as to understand the text going beyond rules of grammar and syntax. Unlike the other genres, poetry is written in verse, which makes it refreshing and challenging from the ordinary language. This paper aims to invite teachers to include poetry since even though the range of reading materials available for EFL teachers is broad with newspaper articles, brochures, letters and more, poems are usually left aside. As Maley and Moulding (1985) claim, “the aim of the English teacher should be to make poetry accessible to the students of EFL/ESL: to make it possible for them to read and enjoy it” (p. 28). Preston (1982) also explains that poetry is an enjoyable experience as students can appreciate language thanks to the presence of rhythm and rhyme; helping students become familiar with the suprasegmental aspects of the target language such as pitch, stress and intonation.

Last but not least, this article promotes the use of poetry over other genres as: “poems usually deal with universal themes, such as love or hate, which are familiar to readers” (Tosta, 1996, p. 62). Hence, “poems bring contexts which are not only

rich culturally but also linguistically and the myth of complexity can be positively approached and serve as an emotional factor, since students will have a feeling of accomplishment as they successfully work with a poem in class” (ibid).

The aim of this essay is to encourage EFL teachers to use poetry in a more widespread way, while also using a methodology that involves techniques applicable to the classroom. In order for this to be achieved, it is necessary to critically reflect on certain methodological approaches, while identifying the coherency and value of such methodologies when applied to the classroom.

1. THE NATURE OF POETRY

According to Todd (2013), poems are an, “emotional synthesis of knowledge and experience” (ibid, p. 81). Poetry is often brief and pushes the poet to provide information and experience with an economy of words that are full of emotional charge and meaning. Hanauer (2003) states that, “poetry provides multileveled access to the individual and thus promotes experience, concept, and understanding of human diversity” (in Todd 2013, p. 81). When writing poetry, a complex multi-process of remembering and visualizing takes place, while at the same time previous knowledge, personal experiences and cultural identity become relevant protagonists. Accordingly, poetry can be used as a pedagogical resource in the EFL world to help the development of learners in several areas, that might not be developed in a first language classroom. Poems, as stated before on this essay, deal with universal topics that can be relatable to people from different nationalities and invite them to critically reflect upon topics related to human life and the world itself. They are encouraged to read between the lines, which is related to Hanauer’s (2012) perspective of viewing the role of EFL learning as a facilitator of personal meaningful expression which emphasises the “presence of the living, historically situated, individual human being at the centre of the language learning process” (106). The purpose of learning a foreign language, according to Hanauer (2012) is not only linguistic and communicative but a process that goes beyond intellectual abilities and that includes emotions, concerns and life experiences. This humanized dimension should be encouraged and developed in the EFL context through poetry, as to provide tools that will help our students in the real world. As Gómez (2018) claims “English teachers are educating learners to become more humanitarian, intercultural, and world citizens in the process of globalization” (p. 358).

Sometimes, EFL teachers simply focus on how fast and how much English our students are learning, rather than on how important or useful this might be. Frequently, teachers are content to have students who will recite dialogues or write stories in automatic English, which they have learnt by heart or repeated like parrots. If this remains commonplace, EFL learners will never truly understand that speaking a second language goes beyond introducing themselves or knowing how to conjugate verbs; it has to do with making them recognise and realise about all the opportunities this knowledge can bring to their lives.

1.1 Poetry as expressive pedagogy

Hanauer (2004, in Lida 2008) has defined poetry as, “a literary text that presents the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the writer through a self-referential use of language that creates for the reader and writer a new understanding of the experience, thought, or feeling in the text” (ibid, p. 10). This definition helps us to clarify the connection between poetry writing and expressive pedagogy. The main objective of expressive pedagogy is to develop the voice of the writer, which in this case refers to the student. This is why the essence of poetry suits pedagogy, since poetry is strongly connected to the voice of the author, who is including his/her own emotions, reflections, thoughts and life experiences. In summary, “poetry is a means for writers to express themselves using a specific rhetoric” (Lida 2008, p. 172). As such, producing poems can provide writers with different opportunities to express themselves in any language. One of the most important features of poetry is that writers have the freedom to write as they want, without following a set of rules; unless they have been asked to follow rules of meter, rhythm and other specific traits that can be present in poems, in contrast, for example, to writing an academic paper (ibid). Despite the fact that there are a few limitations when writing poems, exactly how the piece is organised and which words are chosen to express thoughts or feelings remain the task of the writer.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND LITERATURE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

The most distinctive methodology regarding the use of literature in the EFL classroom is the one devised by Carter and Long (1991). I believe that this theory is the most suitable one for this paper since the main purpose of the latter it is to invite EFL teachers to include poetry in their lessons, and Carter and Long (1991) provided three different perspectives allowing teachers to select the one that fits them best. These approaches are: the cultural approach; the language approach; and the personal growth approach. Each of these represents a different perspective about using a text in the classroom, and therefore each of them has different didactic implications that require consideration.

2.1 The Cultural Approach

According to Oprescu (2012), the cultural model, “enables students to acquire information about authors, cultural trends, and certain periods and even about historical background” (ibid, p. 1). Students do not simply learn about literature; they also learn about culture, helping them to value and understand different ways of life. Fernandez (2013) provides the following example, which helps in gaining a better understanding of this approach. She says that if someone asked us to observe the *Mona Lisa* for a few minutes and then note down information about the painting, we would doubtlessly write down the name of both the painting and its painter, demonstrating how academic we are. This immediate reaction would be caused by how dominated by the cultural approach our vision of the arts is, since this approach tries to give an order to the piece of art to which we are being exposed (whether a poem, painting, story or a song).

This leads us to analyse differences and similarities between each piece of art or to classify them according to styles or historical times (ibid).

2.2 The Language Approach

Carter and Long (1991) suggest that this model is related to language-based approaches in which language structures are imposed and reinforced. They also believe that this approach provides chances to develop and practice productive and receptive skills (writing, speaking, reading and listening), as well as study skills. The latter skill set refers to the encouragement of students to work on their own and to become more independent learners. This practice, in turn, helps them to increase their levels of creativity.

If we return to the example of the *Mona Lisa*, we could say that once it is being observed, experts would explain to us the importance of the colours, shades and light, in addition to the type of paint, the brush and trace that were used while it was painted. The same thing happens when working with a poem, as long as analysis is undertaken of how the words were selected in order to provoke certain reactions in the reader. Fernandez (2013) points out that this analysis can be transferred into the EFL classroom, when explaining the literary language per se. For example, teachers may explain or encourage the study of literary figures in an English poem and how these can affect the minds and perceptions of the readers. A bad use of a poem would be using it as an example to present grammar contents (such as identifying regular verbs). This exercise would destroy the magic of the poem and its literary nature, which is to be read and enjoyed, by simply transforming it into a tool used to identify regular verbs (ibid). I disagree with Fernandez's view, since I think that identifying grammatical items when reading a poem can be possible and positive, and actually change how traditional grammar lessons are conducted. As Schultz explains, "contrary to some previous thinking, researchers are now interested in the potential of literature to enhance grammar and vocabulary acquisition" (in Emmerling 2012, p. 20)). It will simply depend on how the teacher approaches the grammar content, the type of tasks he/she constructs and how it is presented to students.

2.3 The Personal Growth Approach

This approach refers to the students' growth as individuals and how important it is for them to nurture aspects such as critical thinking, creativity, imagination and aesthetic taste. These are features of great importance and are protagonists right throughout students' lives and across their personal development (Carter and Long 1991). In this case, let us imagine that while observing the *Mona Lisa*, someone asks us about how the painting makes us feel or what we believe the subject might have been thinking about or doing while she was being painted. The range of possible answers is infinite and widely varied. Some people might think that *Mona Lisa* herself is mysterious, while others may believe her to have some sort of psychological disorder or even

physical problem that deprives her from smiling (Fernandez 2013). This shows us how differently the same piece of art can be perceived by different people. Consequently, this is why the personal growth model focuses on redirecting student attention towards what the piece of art causes within him/her, while bearing in mind at all times that the reactions of students are not always caused by the poem or painting. Rather, these might be caused by their own personal experiences, backgrounds, previous knowledge or even the particular mood they were in when exposed to the stimulus.

Fernandez (2013) explains that the personal growth approach in the EFL classroom can be very useful and important. Because teachers will push, incite and increase students' curiosity, while also providing space to let students' emotions flow, they will be made to feel something, as well as prompted to think critically. Once the student wishes to express these feelings and thoughts, he/she will have to use his/her foreign language, in this case English, as a tool of communication. This approach seems ideal for the use of poetry in the EFL classroom, and, at the same time it allows the students to go through the text and not simply search for grammatical features or vocabulary. In addition, the students will actually enjoy the experience of reading a poem in a foreign language and, simultaneously, think and reflect about important topics. It can also lead to discussions among students, who will be able to exchange opinions and points of view, encouraging tolerance towards diversity. As Hanauer (2003) states, "poetry reading... offers an insight into the individual multicultural experience and hence can promote the understanding of diversity" (ibid, p. 80). When using poetry in the EFL classroom, students will read, analyse, discuss and understand a text that has not been written in their mother tongue. Hence, they will have to read the text several times and truly absorb the language, images and ideas. I believe reading and writing poetry in a foreign language not only enriches students' vocabulary, but these acts of literacy also help students appreciate the learning of a foreign language as a tool to comprehend more of the world itself and discover diverse features that can be found in other cultures and languages.

I do not think that any one of these approaches is necessarily better than the other, and I do not believe that teachers need to select just one. However, I do believe that, as part of their use, it is extremely important to manage the implications that each may have during a lesson, by identifying which would be the most suitable depending on the previously set objectives.

3. SELECTING LITERATURE

I am convinced that the key to success in using poetry in the EFL classroom relates to the selection of the literary works to be studied in the first place. If a poem is extremely complicated, grammatically and culturally, students will struggle to understand it and its use may have no benefits whatsoever. This situation can negatively affect students' motivation and interest towards the target language preventing them of achieving all the positive benefits that poetry inclusion can provide, that have been discussed

before in this essay; development of language skills, analysis and understanding of universal topics and thinking critically, among others.

Perhaps one way of dealing with this it is to simplify the text, although this might bring some disadvantages. Honeyfield (1977) explains that when simplifying a text, the new version can become diluted and lose its heterogeneity, as the simplification of syntax also reduces coherence and cohesion, which are two key elements that learners need in order to develop reading skills. A potential solution to this problem would be to select poems that are originally syntactically simpler, but that will resonate with the readers regarding plot, character, culture and message.

McKay (1982) suggests another solution; to select poetry that has been written specifically for young adults. Following on from what Donelson and Nilsen (1980, in McKay 1982) stated, McKay believes that this type of literature has one crucial characteristic; it deals with the problem of personal growth and development. Furthermore, these kinds of poems tend to be short and less complex, syntactically, grammatically and stylistically speaking (*ibid*). In addition, I believe that another salient feature when using poetry in the EFL classroom is to select topics or themes to which students can relate and which will, ideally, bring the students' world into the classroom. According to McKay (1982), students already struggle with their feelings and knowledge towards English culture and language, so the literature, "which deals with either of these themes should be highly relevant to them" (*ibid*, p. 532). Since they do not feel a connection with the target language due to how foreign this is, using literature in English may enhance "students' understanding of a foreign culture and perhaps 'spur their own creation of imaginative works'" (McKay, 1982 p. 535) in a language that it is not their native. Allowing students to discover that they have the skills to produce something in another language can be truly motivating and engaging for them, causing a positive impact in their L2 learning process.

3.1 Using poetry in the EFL classroom

Once a poem has been selected, the second step is to successfully deal with it in the classroom. In my opinion, Rosenblatt's (1987) distinction between efferent reading and aesthetic reading is crucial in this regard. Rosenblatt defines efferent reading as the times when the reader is focused on what she/he will carry away. Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, is defined by the reader's concern with what happens during the reading itself. Either way, the poem always works as a stimulus, as the reader comes up with his/her own version of the piece and interacts with it in a unique manner and private experience (*ibid*). For Rosenblatt, this interaction is, "an event in time involving a specific reader, and a specific text at a specific time and place" (in McKay 1982, p.532). As such, if any of these elements are changed, a different event occurs. Thus, a poem that might not have been interesting to a boy when he was 15 might be interesting to him when he reads it 20 years later, as he is adding new experiences into the text and involving himself therein (*ibid*). Perhaps this could also apply in the classroom. For example, we might ask students to read a poem on a particular day on which it may not cause any positive reaction, whereas on the following day

the same poem might make a lot of sense. Would it be a good idea, therefore, to ask our students to leave poems aside for a while and to read them later? According to Rosenblatt (1978), this technique can work and teachers should do it. Widdowson (1978) supports this idea, claiming that, “to present someone with a set of extracts and to require him to read them not in order to learn something interesting... about the world but in order to learn something about the language... is to misrepresent language use to some degree” (ibid, p. 80).

Therefore, the approach to efferent and aesthetic reading must be different. Discovering the usage of a text which is being approached efferently aims to use the text in order to gain information. In aesthetic reading, on the other hand, the experience of reading a text is primary and language should be explored only to the extent that it is relevant to that experience. As McKay (1982) points out, these, “literary experiences outside of a classroom proceed in this manner” (ibid, p. 533). More important for a reader when using the aesthetic approach is “the enjoyment attained by interacting with the text” (ibid, p. 533). Therefore, usage needs to be included only when it obstructs or highlights that experience. If this it is not done, it is possible that an incorrect relationship between the reader and the poem will take place, affecting the authenticity of the entire experience.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR USING POETRY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Using an efferent reading approach can provide certain benefits, such as helping students increase their vocabulary, identify adverbs, adjectives and tenses or any other grammatical structures. Nevertheless, I believe the best approach to use when introducing poetry or literature in the classroom is the aesthetical one, because reading for pleasure and being able to actually live the poem, which has been written in a foreign language, instead of just understanding its grammatical features, will cause a major impact in students’ motivation and interest towards the target language. This can be supported by Tutas’ findings (2006), in which after leading an empirical study about the effects on EFL learners exposed to Rosenblatt’s (1978) scales, found that responding aesthetically to literature facilitates students’ delight and engagement with literature.

With this approach in mind, the following section will address two suggestions for using poetry in the EFL classroom.

4.1 Students creating their own poems

As stated previously, reading a poem allows the reader to form a relationship with the text. This interaction between poem and reader can be even stronger if we ask the reader to become a writer. If we ask our students to write their own poems, they will have the opportunity to work on their creative skills, as well as having an affective and cognitive experience. This is supported by Carter and Long (1991), who explain, “the benefits in confidence and in appreciation of language use can be derived from simple

language-based exercises, designed to promote sensitivity and to develop interpretive skills by exploring awareness of patterns of language “from the inside” (ibid, p. 90).

When asking students to produce their own texts, it is crucial that the teacher provides them with guidance and spends an appropriate amount of time on the process. Since each EFL classroom is different and present its own reality; varied learning styles, interests, age, nationalities, and so on, it would be advisable for the teacher to provide a structured pattern that will help learners to explore, plan, create and produce. This pattern should be adapted and not adopted by teachers, considering all the factors mentioned before. Nevertheless, I would like to offer this sequential model created by D. E Norton (1993, in Perez 2002) as it is simple and easy to adjust:

- Motivating*: Ask writers to discuss daily experiences with their peers. This activity works well as a warm up.
- Brainstorming*: To brainstorm ideas as a group. Students exchange ideas, themes, images, plots, etc.
- Writing*: Students write a poem which is later reviewed by the tutor.
- Sharing*: Students share their poems with the other members of the class and receive feedback.

These steps provide students with the opportunity to explore the particular foreign language, organise ideas, manage sentence structure, select vocabulary and reflect upon which elements to add to the poem. This, in turn, helps them to develop their linguistic competences since they will have to resort to their L2 or linguistic knowledge as to accomplish the task; they will have to reflect, think, make decisions and finally produce a written text in English. The first stage, motivating, is one of the most relevant, and as such teachers have a major role in its implementation. As Hanauer (2012) notes, it is important to explain the relevance of writing a poem to learners. The author believes the main objective is to stimulate students into exploring their own lives and to become interested in expressing this understanding to their peers. Eventually, “the motivation is always self-discovery, self-understanding and self-expression” (ibid, p. 112). During this stage, it is important to create a safe, engaging and trustworthy environment which enables students to begin the process of connecting themselves with the text they are about to create. Simultaneously, and as Hedge (1998) points out, when learners are brainstorming and sharing ideas, it helps them to increase their tolerance towards the opinions of others, as well as learning from multiple perspectives and points of view. At the same time, this can help increase their creativity and imagination.

Hanauer (2012) also states that the writing stage will not be as complicated as most people, especially teachers and students, think and that it is, “relatively simple to do” (ibid, p. 114). For Hanauer, poetry is the visual description of memorised experiences depicted in simple language through the use of direct poetic techniques of imaginary and lining. He also suggests telling our ‘student-poets’ that poetry is about, “showing the experience” and not “telling it” (ibid, p. 114). In my opinion this suggestion is key, as most students usually write a poem based on an experience

in a very descriptive manner, blocking the real flow of feelings, ideas, experiences and even emotions that teachers are trying to extract.

The following section outlines proposals for the type of poem that learners could be asked to produce. These were chosen over other types of poems due to their simplicity; easy to replicate in different contexts and cultural settings, extra materials are not needed; only pen and paper, and the level of difficulty can be modified and graduated by the teacher.

4.1.1 *Acrostics*: short poems in which the first letter, word or syllable of each line in the text spells out a word or a message. Perez (2002) thinks that asking our students to create an acrostic poem with, for example, their names, would help increase their vocabulary. In my opinion, this might be a good idea as long as it is used simply as a warm-up activity, perhaps during the first lesson. This would enable each student to introduce themselves to the rest of the class using adjectives, helping them identify their characteristics and providing them with an opportunity to reflect upon their self-perception and image. I would also ask students to do this with general concepts that can lead to discussions among the group, such as creating an acrostic poem relating to concepts like politics, abortion, drugs, etc.

Example:

Energetic

Mysterious

Magnetic

Affectional

(Example created by the author)

4.1.2 *kennings*: A kenning poem is a riddle made up of several lines of kennings (two word phrases depicting an object using metaphors) in order to describe an object or a person. Asking our students to create a kenning poem might be a challenging activity, since they would have to look for correct words in order to successfully describe something or someone. During this activity, learners will not only be able to put their knowledge of L2 into practice, but will also have the opportunity to think critically about the main features of a person or an object. Furthermore, once they have written their kennings, students can compare them with those of their peers and learn from one another's perceptions. For instance, in the example below students can present their different views regarding the concept of "teacher":

Example:

Teacher

Loud shouter

Deep thinker

Rain hater

Coffee drinker

(Perez 2002, p. 113)

4.1.3 *Limericks*: Popularised by Edward Lear, limericks are usually funny poems that are often meaningless. They consist of five lines, usually beginning with ‘There was a...’, and ending with a person, place or name. The last line of a limerick tends to be unusual, while lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyme, as do 3 and 4. It is important that lines 1, 2 and 5 have seven to ten syllables, while lines 3 and 4 have five to seven.

Example:

*‘There was an old man with a beard
Who said, ‘It is just as I feared,
Two owls and a hen
A lark and a wren
Have all built their nests in my beard!’*

By Edward Lear²

Having our students write a poem in line with these characteristics can be quite challenging and motivating. It also helps to push them to think ‘outside the box’. Usually, when creating a limerick, one is expected to distort, exaggerate and change some aspects of the real world, giving the author the opportunity to create new words and to play with the language. This can be a positive experience for our students, especially those who are nervous or lacking in confidence in terms of their L2 proficiency. Even though students will have a lot of freedom while writing limericks, I suggest teachers provide guidance throughout the entire process. Whatever learners write should still relate to their learning objectives in order to ensure the experience does not lose its educational focus.

4.2 *Dramatizing poetry*

Poetry should be considered a verbal art, and, as such, it represents a remarkable pedagogical resource. According to Todorov (1985), a poem, unlike other kinds of written texts, is an, “entirely constructed world organised by the poet” (in Elting and Firkins 2006, p. 126), while Jakobson (1960, in *ibid*) states that the aesthetic function of language is reflexive apprehension, which places focus on the form of the utterance itself. This is what occurs in poetry, whereby language draws attention to itself, by saying, “notice me, notice the way I see the world around me” (*ibid*, p. 128). Consequently, the dramatization of a poem can be a powerful semantic resource for the EFL teacher, in which the student can be exposed to the aesthetic function of L2. Reciting a poem can help develop feelings towards the foreign language, ideally positive ones. It also helps to ensure new abilities are learnt, such as feeling more comfortable when using L2, and therefore increasing fluency (Elting and Firkins 2006). I agree with this view, although I can think of additional benefits to interpreting poetry, such as the presence of scaffolding between learners regarding oral language, as well as the development of integrated language skills and improved critical

² Retrieved from <https://www.youngwriters.co.uk/types-limerick>

thinking, imagination and interpretation. This is supported by Chauhan (2004) who states that including drama activities in the EFL classroom provides opportunities for authentic communication and can build learners' confidence in speaking English outside the classroom, transforming the language into a tool for their everyday lives while understanding a varied range of linguistic expressions. He writes about the nature of the English language and its learning which is seen not as an isolated item, but embedded in a situation. Drama can be provocative. It does things with words. It can be able to introduce a foreign language as a genuine and essential method of communication. As Kao and O'Neill (1998) explain, using drama in an EFL setting endures interactions between students within the target language, "creating a world of social roles and relations in which the learner is an active participant... the language that arises is fluent, purposeful and generative because it is embedded in context" (p.4)

Previously in this essay, it has been stated that learners should have a response towards the poem, instead of just criticism. If we ask students to dramatize this piece of art, they will be forced to move beyond simply reading the poem, and instead will have to understand the work and provide an interpretation thereof. According to Elting and Firkins (2006), the words of a poem work as images and vehicles, "that jog the students' diverse memories and stimulate creative thoughts" (ibid, p. 129), which are transferred into, "emotional, vocal, facial and physical reactions" (ibid) by the performers.

When using this methodology, teachers would ideally allow their students to be less focused on 'understanding' the exact words within the poem, and concentrate more on the private and unique interpretation of each student. Since each student might have his/her own interpretation, they will have the chance to discuss their own conclusions and share ideas regarding how best to bring the poem to life in front of an audience. This experience will also allow students to become aware on how useful it is to be able to understand and enjoy a piece of text that it is not written in their mother tongue, and that the use of the target language, in this case English, goes beyond being able to complete a worksheet, a form or memorising a dialogue.

It is critical to have an organised plan with key stages when asking students to take, "the poem from the page to the stage" (Elting and Firkins 2006, p. 130). The first step is to select an appropriate poem (ibid) that, preferably, suits the level, age, interests, cultures and backgrounds of the students. I believe that a good idea would be to ask students which type of poetry they prefer or even to have them select the poems they would like to perform themselves. This would give them a sense of ownership towards the entire process. The second step suggested by Elting and Firkins (2006) is for the teacher to read the poem aloud, helping the learners to hear and practice pronunciation, rhythm and intonation, which as it has been explained by Preston (1982), helps students appreciate the language due to the presence of rhythm and rhyme, which helps them become acquainted with suprasegmental aspects of the target language such as intonation, stress and pitch, as well as helping them, "to elaborate the world within the text and connect the world to their own personal experiences" (ibid, p. 131). I believe that an alternative to this stage could be to ask the students to read the poem to themselves, in private, allowing them to focus on the piece and how

it makes them feel or think. Subsequently, students could be divided into small groups in which they can read to one another and enjoy the shape and music of the poem as a collective. Students could also discuss which words are particularly emotive on a personal level, such as those that trigger a memory, an experience or a specific feeling.

The third phase of Elting and Firkins' model is to form the performance groups. They advise work to be undertaken in small teams (two to four students) as this encourages interdependence, since each member becomes valuable. They state that in larger groups, effectiveness in communication and team work is lost. In my opinion, sometimes working with larger groups gives space for greater chaos, which in certain situations can be a positive element. I want students who reflect, think, and defend their own views, and this is most likely to occur if there are a greater number of participants in each team. I would also place significant emphasis on how students are grouped. Efforts should be made to ensure each group is as heterogeneous as possible by mixing students with different levels of proficiency, gender, culture, learning styles and even attitude towards the subject; in this case, English.

The next step, as suggested by Elting and Firkins (2006), is to ask students to decide how the poem will be divided for purposes of dramatization. They argue the best way is to divide poems line by line or stanza by stanza. This approach will allow students to go beyond the exact meaning of the poem, while also having to ask themselves, "how do we bring this poem to life?" (ibid, p. 131). This leaves space to create a whole new, fresh interpretation of the poem, making it more meaningful and relatable for students. An alternative to this step would be to ask students not to divide the poem by lines, but rather to work with it as a whole piece of art. They could also change the original order of the poem, adding or deleting parts of it, and creating their own version of the text. They could modify the nature of the text, for example transforming a sad, melancholic poem into a more hopeful one, or vice versa. As long as they are creating, reflecting, sharing and truly using their L2, this can be a successful activity.

The last phase of this model relates to the actual performance of the poem. Elting and Firkins (2006) believe that each student should be prompted to learn a certain amount of lines by heart, and practice them until they are perfectly polished and learnt. They believe that memorisation is a crucial element of dramatizing poetry, as it allows a more, "focused performance and leaves the students with words of poetry they can recall at will long after the performance has taken place" (ibid, p. 132). Similarly, Wolf (1990) proposes a multi-modal technique for memorising a poem, described as, "read it, write it, speak it, hear it, repeat it and perform it" (ibid, p. 130). Even though I understand the benefits of memorisation, I do not completely agree with this approach. If we ask students to learn lines by heart, they will not be using L2 in an authentic, real and useful manner. I believe that students should be able to understand and interpret their corresponding lines of the poem and then perform this unique interpretation, which might be the exact line or not. If they improvise or change certain aspects, it will show the extent to which they are able to manage L2, and how the language provides them with new tools for communication. In turn, this will make them feel better about themselves, more confident and more highly motivated.

In addition, it should be noted that during each of these stages, teachers need to work as facilitators and moderators, not as leaders. As Elting and Firkins (2006) explain, “each performance team should look within their own groups to draw from their creative resources” (p. 131). Alternatively, as Wolf (1990) has suggested, educators should simply cultivate this natural process by maintaining a productive atmosphere within a supportive community; the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Unfortunately, literature and particularly poetry, does not currently have a place in the English as a Foreign Language classroom as many teachers consider poetry as one of the most sophisticated forms of literature and hence a difficult resource for the EFL classroom, as all the poetic concepts, thinking critically and being able to understand a poem are usually too difficult for L2 learners to grasp. For many learners, literature can be a true source of motivation for reading in English, while simultaneously working as a vehicle which illustrates the use of language and introducing cultural knowledge. As Lazar (1996) explains, literary texts are a rich source of classroom activity that accurately motivate learners. Literary texts, and especially poems, “encompass every human dilemma, conflict and yearning” (Lazar 2007, p. 773), and successfully provoke emotional reactions from learners. When a student is disentangling or decoding a poem, they go beyond a simple mechanical exercise. Rather, this activity requires great involvement and response from the student, simultaneously inviting them to draw on their own experience. While this is taking place, the student, almost unconsciously, becomes increasingly connected on a personal level to the process of learning a language and begins to feel a sense of ownership towards it, making it far more meaningful in the process.

It is important to understand that using poetry in the EFL classroom can genuinely provide an opportunity to teach English using a different teaching approach to the ones that are commonly used by EFL teachers, with classes mainly focused on grammar contents or following a textbook to the letter. This approach can bring about benefits far greater than simply comprehending or using the language in an automatic manner. It goes beyond learning vocabulary, grammar or semantics, which are of course necessary and which do take place when studying poetry. Rather, it can have a strong impact on students’ creativity, imagination, interpretation, critical thinking and reflection, which are L2 skills just as important as those relating to writing, speaking, listening or reading. As Langer (1997) once said, poetry can open, “horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect and explore” (ibid, p. 607).

Introducing poetry into the EFL classroom provides great interaction between learner and poem, learner and peers, and also between learner and teacher. This happens as the teacher pushes students to increase their levels of knowledge, as well as contributing to their self-perceptions, personal growth and development. This is because students begin to show a different part of themselves and are able to express their feelings and beliefs in a safe and free environment. As Paran (2000) clearly

explains in the following quote, “[...] literature, in itself, is worth looking at; because it contributes to growth and development; because through it I can learn from my learners; because through literature I can deal with learners as people, rather than with learners as Language Acquisition Devices; and because... all these are important when teaching a language or indeed, anything, in an educational setting” (ibid, p. 88).

This is precisely my point. It is not simply about seeing our students as language acquisition devices. It is about seeing them as human beings, as people, as persons who have the capacity to think, talk, discuss, defend themselves and successfully use the language they have learnt for more than just simple tasks like filling in a form at an airport. This is relevant, because EFL teachers are educating people to become more intercultural and world citizens, who will be able to move around the world and face varied real-life situations in which managing a second language can be of extreme usefulness. We, as EFL teachers have the opportunity to help our students understand that speaking English goes beyond introducing themselves or knowing how to conjugate verbs; it has to do with making them recognise and realise about all the prospects this knowledge can bring to their lives.

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