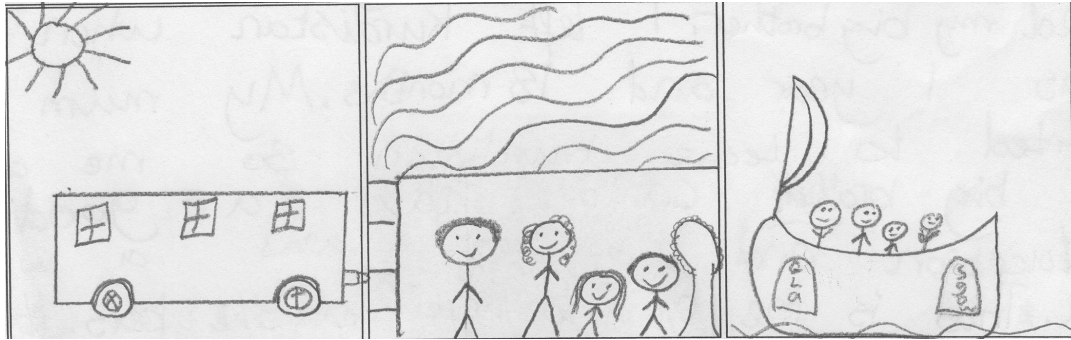


Visual Journeys: Exploring children's visual literacy through intercultural responses to wordless picturebooks



Summary

This on-going international research project involves immigrant and non-immigrant children from different countries responding to the same wordless texts: *Flotsam*, a picturebook by David Wiesner and *The Arrival*, a graphic novel by Shaun Tan. Their wordless nature ensures that children who are not fluent readers of English will not be deterred by the written word and that the research can focus on visuals. Their highly detailed illustrations provide both play and humour but also lead to a serious consideration of the themes of migration, journeys and the power of the visual image itself. Our aim is to explore how the children construct meaning from visual images in complex narratives in order to create strategies that will develop their critical literacy skills, as well as help them reflect on their own or others' experiences of migration, journeys and foreign worlds. The Visual Journeys Project was initially funded by a grant from the Faculty of Education; the main study in Glasgow is currently funded by the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA).

The research teams involved in this project are based in the following universities: the University of Glasgow in Scotland (Dr Evelyn Arizpe, Dr Maureen Farrell and Ms Julie McAdam); the Autonomous University in Barcelona (Dr Teresa Colomer and the GRETEL research group; University of Texas, Austin (Dr Carmen Martínez-Roldán; and the Australian Catholic University NSW, Sydney (Dr Maureen Walsh). The immigrant children in each country in the study belong to different ethnic groups, and because not all the situations are similar –there are refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants- , we defined immigrants as children who have had their primary education interrupted by a 'journey' –or 'journeys'- from their country of origin to the country in which they are living at the time of their participation in the study.

Because we were concerned to allow pupils whose first language was not English to express themselves in as many ways as possible and because the visual image was at the centre of our research, we followed up the oral interviews with a series of visual tasks that allowed the children to interact with the text, such as annotating images, drawing comic strips and taking photographs. Together, these research tools provide information on a) how the children use visual images to represent their own experiences and b) how these images are linked to their reading of the picturebooks.

Findings so far relate to both both the language development of the children from the perspective of the EAL teacher and to the literary development of the children from the perspective of the researchers. Some of these are:

- The children's vocabulary and use of language showed significant development as a direct result of working with the books.

- The picturebooks provided an attractive stimulus for talking, prompting even the quiet ones to say something and relate events to what they themselves have experienced.
- The wordless nature of the books reduced the fear factor of reading books which demand a certain level of English to fully comprehend the key idea.
- The multilayered images encouraged the children to look for meaning in books and look critically – and to appreciate art for its own sake.
- All of the children were able to make sophisticated analysis of the narrative as well as the author's intentions.
- Initially, the children did not possess a vocabulary to discuss the design features of the texts, however with ongoing discussion and the use of questions about design the children began to encompass terms about colour and layout into their responses.
- The children made use of their past lives and experiences of migration to interpret the texts, they also made frequent use of their home literacy practices citing examples from books read in their own language/s, movies, television and the Internet.
- There was an increased awareness of language diversity, personal and cross-cultural connections.

The images the children created are a way of representing their spaces and identities to others, both of which are particularly important for newcomers into a culture. For this group of children, the reading and the follow-up tasks became a way of controlling the way they wanted to see and be seen by others, sharing their wider communities with each other and at the same time contributing their own words to create collective narratives.

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Further information about the project can be found at

http://www.ukla.org/site/research/research_projects_in_progress/visual_journeys/
<http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/how-every-picture-tells-a-new-story-1.984046>
<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/pupils-pioneer-a-wordless-method-of-learning-english-as-additional-language-1.921059>