# 'Once Upon Many Times *Little Red Riding Hood*': Introducing Contemporary Children's Literature to Senior Learners

## 'Érase muchas veces *Caperucita Roja*': Introducción a la literatura infantil contemporánea en las Aulas de la Experiencia

## 'Hi havia moltes vegades la *Caputxeta Vermella*': Introducció a la literatura infantil contemporània a les Aules de l'Experiència

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**Abstract**

Inspired by the idea of Lifelong Education, the University of the Basque Country decided to open its academic program to senior learners, creating the 'Experience Classroom' College. This college, aimed at people over 55 who are not currently working, offers a specific Degree in Human Sciences. One of the compulsory courses of this four-year degree is 'Language and Literature'. The aim of this paper is to present the short-term project to teach children's literature conducted in that course, in which we presented senior learners with a general overview of how the production of children's literature has changed over recent decades. To do so, we analysed the intergenerational classic tale of the Little Red Riding Hood and compared its contemporary retellings. We chose this fairy tale since it is part of a global narrative tradition that has been reinterpreted throughout the history of children's literature according to the social, moral, and literary concerns of each moment. After concluding that most of the learners only knew the Brothers Grimm's versions of the tale, we read both the Perrault and the Brothers Grimm versions and discussed their differences. In the subsequent lessons we brought 25 diverse contemporary retellings of the fairy tale including picturebooks, silent books, illustrated books, comics and verses. The chosen retellings enabled interesting discussions about psychological characterisation, social criticism, humour and parody, and visual codes concerning narrative and semantics. Ultimately, exploration of this book selection revealed to the senior learners the ways in which postmodern trends have become features that characterise contemporary children's literature.

Keywords: children's literature, Little Red Riding Hood, picturebooks, senior learners, adult education

**Resumen**

Inspirada por la idea de la Educación Permanente, la Universidad del País Vasco decidió abrir su programa académico a estudiantes adultos mayores, creando las 'Aulas de la Experiencia'. Este programa, dirigido a personas mayores de 55 años que no realizan actividad laboral remunerada, ofrece un Título Universitario en Ciencias Humanas. Una de las asignaturas obligatorias de este título de cuatro años es 'Lengua y Literatura'. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar el proyecto breve para enseñar literatura infantil realizado en esa asignatura, en el que presentamos a estudiantes adultos mayores una visión general de cómo ha cambiado la producción de literatura infantil en las últimas décadas. Para ello, analizamos el cuento clásico intergeneracional de la *Caperucita Roja* y comparamos sus versiones contemporáneas. Elegimos este cuento tradicional porque es un referente global que ha sido reinterpretado a lo largo de la historia de la literatura infantil según las inquietudes sociales, morales y literarias de cada momento. Después de concluir que la mayoría del alumnado únicamente conocía la versión del cuento de los hermanos Grimm, leímos las versiones de Perrault y de los hermanos Grimm y debatimos sobre sus diferencias. En las clases posteriores, leímos 25 diferentes versiones contemporáneas del cuento, incluidos álbumes ilustrados, álbumes sin palabras, libros ilustrados, cómics y poemas. Las versiones elegidas suscitaron un interesante debate sobre cuestiones como la caracterización psicológica, la crítica social, el humor y la parodia, y los códigos visuales relacionados con la narrativa y la semántica. Por último, la exploración de esta selección de libros reveló a los estudiantes adultos mayores las formas en las que las tendencias posmodernas se han convertido en rasgos que caracterizan la literatura infantil contemporánea.

Palabras clave: literatura infantil, Caperucita Roja, álbum ilustrado, estudiantes adultos mayores, educación de adultos

**Resum**

Inspirada per la idea de l'Educació Permanent, la Universitat del País Basc va decidir obrir el seu programa acadèmic a estudiants adults majors, creant les 'Aules de l'Experiència'. Aquest programa, dirigit a persones majors de 55 anys que no desenvolupen una activitat laboral remunerada, ofereix un Títol Universitari en Ciències Humanes. Una de les assignatures obligatòries d'aquest títol de quatre anys és 'Llengua i Literatura'. L'objectiu d'aquest article és presentar el projecte breu per a ensenyar literatura infantil realitzat en aquesta assignatura, en el qual presentem a estudiants adults majors una visió general de com ha canviat la producció de literatura infantil en les últimes dècades. Per a això, analitzem el conte clàssic intergeneracional de la Caputxeta Vermella i comparem les seves versions contemporànies. Triem aquest conte tradicional perquè és un referent global que ha estat reinterpretat al llarg de la història de la literatura infantil segons les inquietuds socials, morals i literàries de cada moment. Després de concloure que la majoria de l'alumnat únicament coneixia la versió del conte dels germans Grimm, vam llegir les versions de Perrault i dels germans Grimm i vam debatre sobre les seves diferències. En les classes posteriors, vam llegir 25 diferents versions contemporànies del conte, inclosos àlbums il·lustrats, àlbums sense paraules, llibres il·lustrats, còmics i poemes. Les versions triades van suscitar un interessant debat sobre qüestions com la caracterització psicològica, la crítica social, l'humor i la paròdia, i els codis visuals relacionats amb la narrativa i la semàntica. Finalment, l'exploració d'aquesta selecció de llibres va revelar als estudiants adults majors les formes en les quals les tendències postmodernes s'han convertit en trets que caracteritzen la literatura infantil contemporània.

Paraules clau: literatura infantil, Caputxeta Vermella, àlbums il·lustrats, estudiants adults majors, educació d'adults

## 1. 'Experience Classroom' College at the University of the Basque Country

The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education (UNESCO, 1997) declared that the share of elderly people in relation to the world population was higher than ever before, and that the proportion would continue rising. This upward trend has also taken place in the population of the Basque Country during the last two decades. In 2000, the proportion of the Basque population who were 65 or older was of 17.2% and it has increased to 22.8% in 2020 (Eustat, 2021), being higher than in Spain (19.6%) (INE, 2021) and in the EU-27 (20.6%) (Eurostat, 2021).

Global ageing has become one of the defining features of 21$^{st}$ century societies, forcing a whole series of social, economic, scientific, cultural and educational adjustments in accordance with the new situation (Bru, 2012). As stated in the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education (UNESCO, 1997):

> These older adults have much to contribute to the development of society. Therefore, it is important that they have the opportunity to learn on equal terms and in appropriate ways. Their skills and abilities should be recognized, valued and made use of. (p. 6)

It was in this spirit, according to this idea of Lifelong Education, and following the World Declaration on Higher Education (UNESCO, 1998), that the University of the Basque Country decided almost 20 years ago to open its academic program to senior learners (Gillate, 2011). The institution created the 'Experience Classroom' College, an educational initiative included in the White Book of Lifelong Learning of the Basque Government (2004).

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This college, aimed at people over 55 who are not currently working, offers a specific degree in Human Sciences. This degree aims to spread culture and knowledge to improve their quality of life (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014) and to promote an active aging, in addition to paying tribute to the generations to whom we owe today´s economic and social welfare. The classes are face-to-face and the courses are passed without the need for exams, although the senior learners are required to attend at least 80% of the classes of each course.

This four-year degree encompasses a wide range of courses that cover various thematic fields of culture and science, such as Anthropology, Art, IT, Health, History, Language, Law, Literature,

Music, Nutrition, Pedagogy, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology. Besides those courses, complementary activities such as didactic outings, excursions, talks or cultural and social events are organised outside the university to enrich the learning experience of senior learners, as well as foster their personal relationships.

One of the compulsory courses of the Degree in Human Sciences is 'Language and Literature' and its teaching is assumed by the Department of Didactics of Language and Literature. This course is divided into two subjects held in the first and second year. 'Language and Literature I' offers a panoramic approach towards different aspects related to the study of language and seeks to highlight how languages arise, how they are learned, how they vary, and, ultimately, how they work. 'Language and Literature II' presents the main periods, currents, genres, and general trends of Spanish Literature through the reading and analysis of representative authors and works.

In this context, and considering that the classes of this course at the Campus of Araba are held in the Faculty of Education and Sport, we decided to carry out, as a bridge between both subjects, a short-term project. The aim was to teach children's literature to first-year senior learners in the last three lessons of the 'Language and Literature I' that we entitled 'Once upon many times *Little Red Riding Hood*'.

## 2. Reasons for teaching children's literature to senior learners

After the efforts made during the last three decades of the 20th century (Moreno Verdulla & Sánchez Vera, 2000), during 21st century children's and young adult literature has been consolidated as an academic field in Spanish universities (Díaz-Plaja, 2009). Nevertheless, its presence in university curriculum, in terms of core courses, is minimal (Cerrillo & Utanda, 2000). Thus, while the use of children's and young adult literature seems to be limited to certain programmes of Initial Teacher Education, its use in Adult Education may seem paradoxical.

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On the contrary, as English (2000) explains: "children's literature enables significant adult learning because it facilitates learning through experience, responds to the adult need to have relevant educational experiences which enhance critical thinking (…)" (p. 13). Likewise, according to Ho (2000), children's literature is also suitable for adult learners because it offers:

> [S]ources of knowledge, particularly concerning history and culture (folklore), sociological and psychological insights into realistic fiction, and a story framework for reading and writing when exploring genres, whether comprehending or composing. Children's literature also enriches the arts and humanities, such as visual arts and drama, and encourages the faculty of imagination. (p. 260)

Following this idea, Bloem & Padak (1996) emphasises that the benefits of using children's literature with adult learners cannot be underestimated:

> First-rate children's literature offers the same benefits that any high quality literature and art offer, including the pleasure of a good story, the experience of knowing other people and places, and the opportunity to reflect or examine ideas and values. In short, like all good literature, children's literature provides a forum that allows us to see or think in a new way. (p. 49).

Being so, children's literature has become a valuable tool for adult literacy (Sharp, 1991; Handel & Goldsmith, 1989; Bloem & Padak, 1996;) and for teaching English as a foreign language to adult learners (Ho, 2000). Even so, there does not seem to be any research about how children's literature may be used with senior learners. Therefore, we hope our analysis and reflections of the short-term teaching project 'Once upon many times *Little Red Riding Hood*' will contribute to further research concerning the use of children's literature with senior learners.

Although children's literature is not part of the syllabus of the 'Language and Literature' course, we decided that these senior learners would appreciate knowing more about the characteristics of contemporary children's literature and how it has evolved over recent decades for several reasons. First of all, because they spend a lot of time with children. In the Basque Country, as del Barrio et al. (2011) point out:

> el ejercicio del principio de reciprocidad a través de la transferencia de cuidados en el ámbito familiar tiene una relevancia muy importante en nuestra cultura. (...) Entre las personas mayores la práctica de solidaridad familiar más frecuente es el cuidado de nietos/as. (p. 90)

> [the exercise of the principle of reciprocity through the transfer of care in the family environment is of very important relevance in our culture. (...) Among the elderly, the most frequent practice of family solidarity is caring for grandchildren]. Translated by the authors.

In that sense, in 2010 in the Basque Country, among the people over 60 who have grandchildren (72%), a 45.5% indicated that they helped their children frequently with childcare. Moreover, 29.7% of the people who take care of their grandchildren do so every day, similar to those who provide this help once or twice a week. That is, 59.2% of the grandparents take care of their grandchildren at least once a week (del Barrio et al., 2011). Some years later, another study carried out in the Basque Country in 2016 showed that 20% of grandmothers and 19% of grandparents who have grandchildren take care of them every day, and 21% of grandmothers and 25% of the grandparents do so several times a week (Gabinete de Prospección Sociológica, 2017).

Therefore, at least in the Basque Country it is common for grandparents to take care of their grandchildren while the parents are at work. During that time, they play, eat, go to the park, watch TV, do homework, read together or grandparents tell children stories. When special dates like Christmas or birthdays arrive, it is also usual for them to give their grandchildren books as present. Even if they do not have grandchildren, books are also a common gift when a friend's grandchild is born. However, due to the exponential growth that children's publishing market has undergone in Spain in the 21st century (Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez, 2018), senior learners may not be aware of the characteristics of contemporary children's literature and the changes over recent decades. Thus, they may have trouble choosing quality children's books.

Given that children's literature is a concrete cultural product and, therefore, children's books are subject to certain historical, cultural and educational conditions (Shavit, 1986), we decided to illustrate its evolution with the turn of the century by means of the retellings of the *Little Red Riding Hood*. Through a study of fairy tales and an analysis of how the genre has been transformed, it is possible to understand the evolution of children's literature, what it offers and demands of its readers (Bellorín, 2015).

> Desde sus inicios, los libros para niños han ido adecuando los elementos del folklore a su público. Las historias tradicionales se han ido reformulando para ajustarse a las exigencias del mercado y para encajar en los discursos de la postmodernidad y en las dinámicas de la globalización. (p. 16)
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> [Since their inception, children's books have adapted the elements of folklore to their audience. Traditional stories have been reformulated to fit the demands of the market and to fit into the discourses of postmodernity and the dynamics of globalization.] Translated by the authors.

Although senior learners might be unfamiliar with the characteristics of contemporary children's literature, there was little doubt that they would know *Little Red Riding Hood.* This fairy tale is a worldwide literary reference that has been shared and reinterpreted so many times according to social, moral, political, educational and literary concerns (Zipes, 1993 & 2002; Colomer, 1996), that it appears to be a universal icon (Beckett, 2008) or meme (Zipes, 2012).

## 3. *Little Red Riding Hood*: the intergenerational fairy tale par excellence

Rodari (1973) said that with just these five words –girl, forest, flowers, wolf and grandmother– everybody would evoke the same fairy tale (Etxaniz, 2020). Not surprisingly, if there is a quintessential fairy tale that has been passed down from generation to generation in Western societies, that is *Little Red Riding Hood*. It is one of the first fairy tales that many older adults have been told, and it is likely that it will be one of the first they will tell their children and grandchildren (Orenstein, 2002). Furthermore, it has been one of the most retold and reinterpreted fairy tales of the 20th century, with more than a hundred different versions since World War II (Colomer, 1996), and "it is indisputably the most commented on fairy tale of all time" (Becket, 2002, p. XV). It has been widely studied from several perspectives such as Literary Studies (Ziolkowski, 1992; Becket, 2002 & 2008; González Marín, 2005; Martin, 2006; Secreto, 2013), Folklore Studies (Mieder, 1982; Dundes, 1989; Douglas, 1995), Psychoanalytical Studies (Roheim, 1953; Bettelheim, 1977), and Gender Studies (Bottigheimer, 1987; Marshall, 2004) among others.

> **If there is a quintessential fairy tale that has been passed down from generation to generation in Western societies, that is Little Red Riding Hood**

Orenstein (2002) argues that the multidisciplinary interest aroused by this fairy tale is in response to the opposition of archetypes, some of the fundamental concerns of the human race such as family, morality, growing and aging or relationships between the sexes.

> (…) it explores the boundaries of culture, class, and specially, what it means to be a man or a woman. The girl and the wolf inhabit a place, call it the forest or call it the human psyche, where the spectrum of human sagas converges and where their social and cultural meanings play out. (p. 8)

Today this story is approached with the wrong idea of its simplicity (Orenstein, 2002), an approach probably influenced by the "simplicity assumption" that seems inevitably linked to the

concept of children's literature. Nevertheless, we must not forget that these fairy tales were not originally aimed at a child audience (Bettelheim, 1977).

> Eran narrados por adultos para placer y edificación de jóvenes y viejos; hablaban del destino de las personas, de las pruebas y tribulaciones que había que afrontar, de sus miedos y sus esperanzas, de sus relaciones con el prójimo y con lo sobrenatural, y todo ello bajo una forma que a todos les permitía escuchar el cuento con delectación y al mismo tiempo reflexionar acerca de su profundo significado. (Etxaniz, 2020, p. 35)

> [They were narrated by adults for the pleasure and edification of the young and the old; they spoke of the fate of the people, of the trials and tribulations that must be faced, of their fears and their hopes, of their relationships with others and with the supernatural, and all this in a way that allowed everyone to listen to the story with delight and at the same time reflect on its deep meaning]. Translated by the authors.

In the short-term project entitled 'Once upon many times *Little Red Riding Hood*' which we planned to teach children's literature to first-year senior learners, we did not intend to explain the historical evolution of children's literature through the trajectory of this fairy tale. Neither did we offer a thorough and extensive study of the variations or symbols present in its multiple retellings. On the contrary, we leveraged the timelessness of this shared literary reference to present some of the current characteristics of contemporary children's literature to people much older than its implied reader.

## 4. 'Once upon many times *Little Red Riding Hood*' teaching project

We conducted the short-term teaching project 'Once upon many times *Little Red Riding Hood*' on January 2020, at the end of 'Language and Literature I', one of the compulsory courses of the specific Degree in Human Sciences at 'Experience Classroom' College at the University of the Basque Country.

Although there were 50 people enrolled in this course, an average of 35 people attended this project (figure 1), which was divided into three lessons of one hour and a half each. 12% of the people enrolled in this course never attended, 4% attended just a single lesson, 34% attended two lessons and 44% attended the full project. The main reason given by the senior learners to justify their absences was that some lessons coincided with cultural events organized by the 'Experience Classroom' College like an opera concert or a visit to an exhibition.
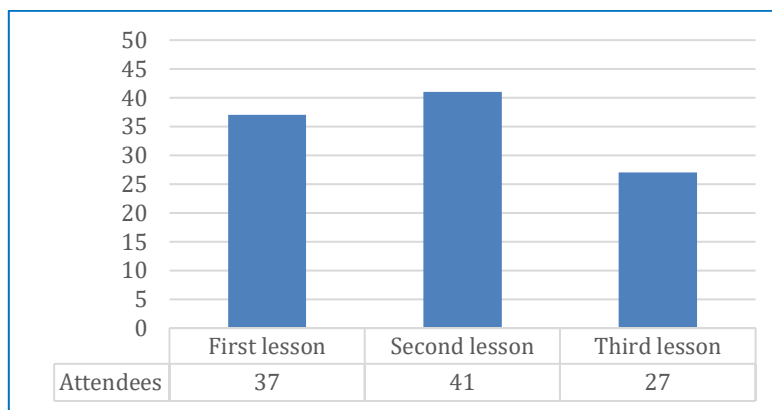
**Figure 1.** Number of attendees at each lesson of 'Once upon many times Little Red Riding Hood'

## 4.1. Memories about Little Red Riding Hood

In the first lesson, we introduced ourselves to the senior learners and explained the main aim of the project: to present some of the current characteristics of contemporary children's literature through the retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*. In order to know their background, we asked senior learners to write this fairy tale from the point where Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf in the woods. With this task, we wanted to know which version of the fairy tale they remembered, specifically which ending. 92% of the learners attending the first lesson only knew about the Brothers Grimm's version of the tale, in which Little Red Riding Hood is rescued by a hunter. The remaining 8% of the learners commented that they also remembered the ending in which the wolf eats both Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. Nonetheless, there was not as much consensus on how the hunter saved Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. Some remembered that the grandmother hides in the closet when the wolf break into her house, and others that he devours her so fast that she ends up in his stomach on one piece. Others remembered that the hunter arrives just in time to stop the wolf from eating Little Red Riding Hood, and others that he arrives too late and finds the wolf taking a nap in grandmother's bed. When he hears the cries for help coming from the wolf's stomach, he opens it taking Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother out safe and sound. Almost 25% of the learners also remembered that, after being rescued, the hunter and Little Red Riding Hood fill the wolf's belly with stones. However, most of them mentioned that when the wolf wakes up from his nap, contrary to what happens in the

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Brothers Grimm's version, he is so thirsty that he decides to approach the river to drink water; when he bends down, he falls into the river and drowns by the weight of the stones he did not realise he was carrying inside. This deviation from the original version of Brothers Grimm shows the close relationship between the tale of *The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats* and *Little Red Riding Hood,* as pointed out by González Marín (2006). Notwithstanding this resemblance, none of the learners had ever heard about Little Red Riding Hood's encounter with a second wolf.

Given that most of the learners only knew about the Brothers Grimm's version of Little Red Riding Hood, we read both Perrault's (2016/1697) and Brothers Grimm's (1984/1857) version in pairs and discussed their differences focusing on the characters and the endings. Moreover, we brought up the elements of the tale that were developed in an oral tradition and were removed or adapted in the first literary versions. In that debate, some of the learners stated that Perrault's version did not seem appropriate for a child audience. Consequently, it allowed us to explain the historical context in which each version was written, their implied reader and we reflected on the morals and values that were intended to be transmitted at each moment. Thereby, we

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concluded that the close relationship between children's literature and the transmission of various values or, in other words, the moral discourse of children's literature, is undeniable (Etxaniz, 2004). This being the case, readers may be aware of the author's moralizing intentionality, but the alleged lack of a clear didactic purpose can make it difficult to perceive the existing moralizing discourse

(Etxaniz, 2004). At the end of the first lesson, after discussion and debate about the moral and educational function of children's literature, we read aloud James Finn Garner's (1995/1994) version of *Little Red Riding Hood,* in which, through parodic humour, the politically correctness and censorship of children's literature is taken to the absurd.

The second and third lesson of this project followed the same structure. We introduced 25 diverse contemporary retellings of the fairy tale that were published from 1998 to 2020 (see appendix) in order to describe their characteristics and to analyse their differences. Most of them were picturebooks and silent books, but we also included some illustrated books, comics and verses, all of them published in Spanish except for the silent picturebooks.

## 4.2. Introducing picturebooks to senior learners

As Daly and Blakeney-Williams (2015) describe, the effectiveness of the use of picturebooks in the classroom has been demonstrated in many curriculum areas, but as we previously pointed out, there does not seem to be any research about how picturebooks may be used with senior learners.

We decided to primarily use picturebooks for two main reasons. Firstly, because it allowed us to read several retellings in the hour and a half that each class lasted, and, secondly, due to the proliferation of these type of books in the current production of children's literature.

> If during the eighties we saw children's and young adult narrative consolidating itself in the dimension of written literature, children's narrative today seems to be characterised as a multimodal literary form. (…) This change is embodied in the picturebook and its apparent dominance within the children's publishing market. (Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez, 2018, p. 391)

While the picturebook was conceived as a book for early readers already in the 1930s and the bases of what we nowadays understand by picturebook were settled in the 1960s (Duran, 2000), it was more than likely that the senior learners had not heard of this type of book or were aware of its specificity. That is why we decided to start the second lesson with a brief explanation about what a picturebook is and about the aspects that must be taken into account when reading it.

Based on the definition proposed by Bosch (2012) in which a picturebook is a "story composed of fixed, printed, sequential images consolidated in a book structure whose unit is the page and in which the illustrations are primordial and the text may be underlying" (p. 75, apud Bosch, 2018), we highlighted that a picturebook is not only the result of the relation between text and illustrations, but also of the peritextual elements since the materiality of the book can also become a discursive element (Van der Linden, 2013/2015).

> Todo tiene significado en el álbum. Hay que concebirlo como un sistema global cuyos principales componentes (pertenecientes a la materialidad, al contenido, a la expresión o a la compaginación) participan, en distinto grado, en la producción de significado, según las opciones elegidas por cada creador. (p. 35)
>
> [Everything has meaning on the picturebook. It must be conceived as a global system whose main components (pertaining to materiality, content, expression or layout) participate, to varying degrees, in the production of meaning, according to the options chosen by each creator.] Translated by the authors.

Therefore, we described some of the peritextual elements and material aspects of the book that may have the greatest impact on the semantic construction of the picturebook: the format (size and shape), the dustjacket, the front and back covers, the endpapers, the frontispiece, the full title page and the gutter (Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez, 2018).

We explained how the size of the picturebook can influence the appreciation or response of the reader (Nodelman, 1988; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Matulka, 2008; Lambert, 2015) even before starting to read. On one hand, the small size format favours a relationship of intimacy with the reader (Colomer, 2010), creating a relationship of proximity and possession (Aumont, 1990, apud Bosch, 2015). On the other hand, the large format establishes a physical distance between the reader and the book, as if it were a spectacle, which is why they are usually ideal to be read in groups (Colomer, 2010). A large-format picturebook induces an exploratory and collective reading (Van der Linden, 2013/2015; Bosch, 2015).

Regarding the most common shapes of the picturebook, we distinguished the vertical rectangular, the horizontal rectangular and the square. The vertical rectangular format is often considered the most common, neutral and balanced (Colomer, 2010), since verticality provides a certain stability. Verticality does not exclude the representation of landscapes, although it gives little support to the idea of movement (Van der Linden, 2013/2015). In addition, it is usually used both in picturebooks that focus on a single episode to emphasize, for example, a gesture or the expression of a character (Nodelman, 1988; Lee, 2013/2014), and in those that use multiple panels (Nikolajeva, 2008; Colomer, 2010) to represent various actions or different situations. If the vertical rectangular shape guides the reader's gaze from top to bottom, the horizontal rectangular shape does so from left to right (Matulka, 2008), which conveys a certain sense of dynamism. Therefore, it is usually used to describe a journey or trip (Nikolajeva, 2008; Van der Linden, 2013/2015; Bosch, 2015) or for certain panoramic representations, such as landscapes (Colomer, 2010). Over and above, the picturebook with square shape, it becomes a horizontal rectangle when it is open, which allows combining both forms depending on whether the illustration occupies a single page or the double-page spread.

In addition to its format, we expressed that the cover is usually the first thing a reader sees of a picturebook, although sometimes it can be totally or partially covered by other material elements such as a dust jacket. Now, except for the occasions in which these elements are used, we made clear that the front cover is the business card of a picturebook. In this sense, Salisbury (2004) emphasizes the importance of the graphic design of a cover, since it must "promote the book and demand attention, while at the same time being true to the spirit of the book's

contents" (p. 100). So, contrary to the popular saying, to not judge a book by its cover, the visual information on the cover is usually the basis on which the reading response to the rest of the picturebook is built (Nodelman, 1988). Furthermore, Nikolajeva (2008) maintains that it is a highly significant part, as it can provide vital information to understand the story, but without revealing too much of its content. An opinion also shared by Díaz Armas (2006), who assures that, if observed carefully, the cover can offer abundant information:

> La información que un lector atento puede extraer de la cubierta es amplia. En ella pueden encontrarse prácticamente completos los siguientes datos: protagonista, tema, conflicto, tono, género literario, intención, referencias intertextuales, tipo de relación intertextual. Estos indicios desplegados ante los ojos del lector/espectador de un álbum permiten a veces una anticipación directa, sin fisuras. (p. 34)

> [The information that an attentive reader can extract from the cover is extensive. In it, the following data can be found practically complete: protagonist, theme, conflict, tone, literary genre, intention, intertextual references, type of intertextual relationship. These signs displayed before the eyes of the reader / viewer of a picturebook sometimes allow a direct anticipation, without fissures.] Translated by the authors.

Given that the front cover is the gateway to the content of the picturebook, and that this is of vital importance both to attract the potential reader and for the construction of expectations and hypotheses about the story, we also highlighted the discursive value that the back cover can acquire.

> The back cover is also a possible narrative space. Normally, back covers carry some information about the author, a short plot summary, and perhaps some reviews. Yet occasionally the back cover is an indispensable part of the story. At the least, front and back cover present an inseparable whole establishing and accentuating the visual narrative space. (Nikolajeva, 2008, p. 60).

We explained to the senior learners how the picturebook requires, unlike the illustrated book, a careful and detailed reading of the entire book. Otherwise, the reader could miss significant information for the global understanding of the narrative or ignore parallel stories to the main plot. Díaz Armas (2003) refers to this expansion of the narrative function towards material and peritextual elements of the picturebook as a physical overflow beyond the book. This over-information is not only limited to the cover and the dust jacket, but it can also be extended to

other internal peritextual spaces, such as the endpapers, the frontispiece, the full title page or the credits page.

To finish the explanation about picturebooks, we outlined that some illustrators not only manage to integrate the gutter into the composition of the double-page, but also give it a narrative function. After this brief introduction, we distributed the selected books so that the senior learners could read them in pairs.

## 4.3. Reading contemporary children's literature

As we have stated, the main aim of this teaching project was to present some of the current characteristics of contemporary children's literature to senior learners. To do so, we based the selection of the retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* to use in this project (see appendix) on the PhD dissertation carried out by Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez (2018). She analysed the characteristics of the most significant narrative works of children's literature published within the Spanish market between 2003 and 2013 aimed at readers between 8 and 10 years old.

Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez (2018) concludes that contemporary children's narrative, "having been consolidated as written literature, incorporates the visual code in its narrative and semantic construction: a combination of languages that make the picturebook a unique and ideal ecosystem in which to introduce narrative complications" (p. 393). This feature is clearly evident in the retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood,* used in the second and third lesson of this teaching project.

Regarding the literary representation of the world, the results of Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez's (2018) study show that "the moral element, a more psychological characterisation of the characters, social criticism of the modern lifestyle as the underlying theme, along with humour and parody as a literary game, are what characterise the current narrative" (Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez, 2018, p. 390). As a sample of those features, senior learners read in pairs the retellings shown in table 1 and we discussed their characteristics and differences, for example: characters, plot, endings, illustrations, point of view, topics, ways of telling, etc.

| Feature of contemporary children's literature | | Retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* |
|---|---|---|
| Literary representation of the world | The moral element | – *Raconte à ta façon... Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (Chaine & Pichelin, 2016)<br>– *Caperuza* (Martín Vidal, 2016)<br>– *Caperucita Roja* (Mistral & Valdivia, 2014)<br>– *Caperucita Roja* (Potter, & Oxenbury, 2019)<br>– *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (Rascal, 2002)<br>– *Caperucita Roja* (Serra, 2019) |
| | A more psychological characterisation of the characters | – *La ladrona de sellos* (Arnal, & Blasco, 2014)<br>– *En el bosque* (Browne, 2004)<br>– *A* (Martínez Oronoz, 2018)<br>– *Boca de Lobo* (Negrín, 2005) |
| | Social criticism of the modern lifestyle as the underlying theme | – *La niña de rojo* (Innocenti & Frisch, 2019/2012) |
| | Humour and parody as a literary game | – *El cartero simpático o unas cartas especiales* (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 2020/1986)<br>– *Cuentos en verso para niños perversos* (Dahl & Blake, 2016/1982)<br>– *Lo que no vio Caperucita Roja* (Ferrero, 2013)<br>– *La noche de la visita* (Jacques, 2010/2008).<br>– *Caperucita Roja, Verde, Amarilla, Azul y Blanca* (Munari & Agostinelli, 1999/1993)<br>– *Caperucita Roja (tal y como se lo contaron a Jorge)* (Pescetti & O'Kif, 1998)<br>– *La verdadera historia de Caperucita* (Rodríguez Almodóvar & Taeger, 2004)<br>– *El apestoso hombre queso y otros cuentos maravillosamente estúpidos* (Scieszka & Smith, 2004/1992) |

**Table 1.** Retellings of *Little Red Ridding Hood.*

**Note.** Retellings of Little Red Ridding Hood as an example of the features of contemporary children's literature regarding the literary representation of the world defined by Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez (2018).

Likewise, Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez (2018) concludes contemporary children's literature narratives "require an active participation on the part of the reader for their interpretation have become the norm" (p. 391). We reflected on this trait and how it ascribes to the influence of the

postmodern condition in children's literature mainly through open endings, metafictional resources, and ironic humour present in a large part of the retellings used in this project.

When the senior learners read the retellings in pairs, they spontaneously conversed in small groups about the characteristics of contemporary children's literature just mentioned. However, at the end of the third lesson, we made a general conclusion of everything read and learned during this teaching project.

The senior learners who attended this project participated actively in it, exchanging ideas, opinions and reading experiences. Many of them stated that they enjoyed the lessons and that they would read some of those books with their grandchildren. At the end of the teaching project, we carried out an opinion survey among them.

The opinion survey was designed by the University of the Basque Country and it is used by all the people who teach at any course of bachelor's and master's degrees offered by the university. The results of the opinion surveys are included in the internal quality processes of the faculties as well as in the renewal of the accreditation of the degrees. The results of this opinion survey revealed that their interest in children's literature increased, that despite not having any prior knowledge on the subject

**The results of this opinion survey revealed that their interest in children's literature increased, that despite not having any prior knowledge on the subject they did not find the project difficult, and that the bibliography and materials used contributed to their learning process**

they did not find the project difficult, and that the bibliography and materials used contributed to their learning process. Altogether, on a scale of 1 to 5, the general satisfaction of senior learners was 4.5. In short, the objective of the project was achieved by promoting dialogue, teamwork and reflective attitude among the senior learners.

## 5. Conclusions

Through the 'Once upon many times Little Red Riding Hood' teaching project we presented a general overview of the changes that have taken place over recent decades in the production of children's narrative to first-year senior learners enrolled in 'Language and Literature I', one of the compulsory courses of the Degree in Human Sciences at 'Experience Classroom' College at the Campus of Araba of the University of the Basque Country. To do so, we analysed the intergenerational classic tale of the *Little Red Riding Hood* and compared its contemporary retellings.

By means of a shared reading and literary gathering, we reflected on the moral discourse of children's literature, and on how it is adapted to the social, axiological, political, educational and literary values of the historical and cultural context in which it is published. We also discuss findings from a previous research (Fernández de Gamboa Vázquez, 2018) such as that postmodern trends, a more psychological characterisation of the characters, the social criticism of the modern lifestyle as the underlying theme, humour and parody as a literary game, along with the incorporation of the visual code in its narrative and semantic construction are some of the features that characterise contemporary children's literature.

**The results of this opinion survey revealed that their interest in children's literature increased, that despite not having any prior knowledge on the subject they did not find the project difficult, and that the bibliography and materials used contributed to their learning process**

The present work provides a description of a teaching project about children's literature for senior learners, a description that could be expanded with future studies on how senior readers respond to children's literature and picturebooks. Future studies are also needed to determine if children's literature should be included in the curriculum of courses aimed at senior learners.

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## 7. Appendix

Books used in the 'Once upon many times Little Red Riding Hood' teaching project.

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## 8. NOTE

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