

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CREATIVITY IN TEACHING ENGLISH

The content of this chapter is supported by the presentation of my teaching methods and my pupils' work in the video film *English with Fourth Graders* (Vilke, 1995).

The advantages of cross-curricular language teaching are well known: the new language is seen by the children as something normal and natural, not as something separated from the rest of their learning.

Some other reasons for integrated FL teaching could be added to these given above:

If pupils participate in such an intensive and motivating FL course, as the case is with pupils who take part in the Croatian Project of learning a FL from the first grade, they are adequately prepared for more extensive work, both linguistic and content work. Such interdisciplinary education enables them not only to attain better FL competence and simultaneously widen and strengthen other subject knowledge, but also to satisfy their interests in the world around them and "real life" in a more natural way (i.e., through Topic work/Project work chosen to suit their interests). Thus, children tend to develop their self-confidence and a more critical approach to problems, their knowledge is more coherent and they display more readiness to explore.

Moreover, cross-curricular teaching facilitates the development of children's creative thinking more significantly than if I were to teach English and Art separately. My teaching experience has shown the advantages of cross-curricular teaching, especially in the area of pupils' motivation and results as well.

*The development of children's creative thinking* refers to teaching children to develop flexibility of thought and to be inventive, (i.e., to be able to solve any given problem in a new and most effective way). The creative mind is based on exploration activities.

Art with its creativity aspect helps this process considerably since it stimulates children to do permanent exploration and experimental activities, not only while doing Art tasks given by the teacher, but very often while doing ones for the sake of their own interest and curiosity.

This is attributed to the phenomenon that children, once stimulated to draw, usually develop the need to express themselves by drawing. They also, nearly without any exception, love painting, modelling, and building up activities (Tomašević-Dančević, 1993). They most often than not self-initially explore, do experiments and find creative solutions to self-given problems, all of which give Art a special place in children's learning process.

Although this discussion is on the development of creative thought through cross-curricular teaching with Art, I want to point out that teaching/learning any school subject can prompt children's creativity of mind, and especially when integrated teaching approaches are used.

As for the role of Art activities in this process, Betty Edwards in her book *"Drawing On the Right Side of the Brain"* (1989) states:

"By learning to draw you will learn to see differently and, as the artist Rodin lyrically states, to become confident of the natural world, to awaken your eye to the lovely language of forms, to express yourself in that language.

(...) From this (drawing) experience you will develop your ability to perceive things freshly in their totality, to see underlying patterns and possibilities for new combinations. Creative solutions to problems, whether personal or professional, will be accessible through new modes of thinking and new ways of using the power of your whole brain.

Drawing, pleasurable and rewarding though it is, is but a key to open the door to other goals."

It is worth noting here that this also works with other Art techniques, for example painting or sculpting. In addition, Environmental education, one of the themes of this chapter, is perfectly suited to both integrated FL teaching and the development of children's creative thinking.

In her article *Linking the classroom to the world: The Environment and EFL*, Susan Stempleski (1993) claims:

"This concern (recognition of the urgency of environmental problems) is reflected in schools around the world, where teachers of all subjects and at all grade levels are using the environmental theme as a means of linking the classroom to the world."

Unfortunately, in the Croatian educational system there is neither an interdisciplinary curriculum at any school level, nor an environmental curriculum. The experiments in both these fields are mostly left to the teachers themselves.

As for *linking the classroom to the world*, it should become a more common way of teaching subjects at school not only to increase pupils' motivation, but also because learning at school is only one aspect of children's daily learning with its ultimate aim, i.e., to prepare them for real life (Tomašević-Dančević, 1993). Of course, school should teach children to increase the quality of that "real life".

In the article referred to earlier, S. Stempleski (1993) maintains:

"Environmental topics can be linked to every subject in the curriculum: science, history, geography, mathematics, even music and art. By using the environment as a theme, we can help bridge the gap between EFL and other school subjects. Students gain academic knowledge and develop skills that can enhance achievement in all areas of the curriculum."

I will demonstrate this later, using examples from my teaching experience.

The same author also remarks (Stempleski, 1993):

“In addition to providing of framework for the practice of the basic skills, environmental topics can serve as a focus for stimulating the development of higher language skills such as critical thinking, group decision-making, and selective reading.”

Moreover, a higher language skill, such as creative writing, can be added. It is practised quite a lot in my classes and combined with making up stories. Both activities are usually done as follow-up activities on well-known stories.

As for the role of story in ELT, Edie Garvie in her book *Story as Vehicle* (1990:19) states:

“In English language teaching (ELT) courses for primary teachers (...), story usually features as one technique or strategy amongst many others (...). There is also a fair bit about it in the literature, often linked with other strategies such as use of music, puppets and drama, and creative writing.”

What is advocated in her book is “that story can also be used as a methodology for pulling everything else together (...), to carry all the important things we want our pupils to learn about and do with English.”

According to the quotation of James Moffet (Rosen, 1995), story has an important role in the lives of children:

“They (children) utter themselves almost entirely through stories – real or invented – and they apprehend what others say through story.”

Garvie also claims:

“Story stimulates and gives enjoyment. This is a prime purpose which must not be forgotten” (Garvie, 1993).

Additionally, in the story she sees a “wonderful opportunity for furthering the child’s awareness of language.” (Garvie, 1990:19).

Andrew Wright (1993) finds several reasons why story should play a central role in ELT to children: 1. motivation, 2. meaning, 3. fluency, 4. language familiarisation, 5. stimulus for speaking and writing, 6. communication, and 7. general curriculum.

If we follow the “Cummins Debate” (Garvie, 1990: 7-15), story could be said to help the development of both BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive, academic language proficiency), especially when children create and write down their story themselves.

To conclude the theoretical part of this paper some observations about children’s story invention and creative writing in EFL should be considered. It should be noted that with very young learners these two skills cannot in an equal manner develop in equal proportion, since their speaking abilities are much better than their writing ones.

As a result of being intensively exposed to appropriate and inspiring children's literature (poetry and stories) and to the relevant follow-up work, children at an early age are able to create and tell their own poems and stories in English.

On the other hand, teaching/learning creative writing in EFL is a long-lasting process. Writing a poem or a story for other children to read is preceded by gradual writing activities such as writing at word level (e.g., labels, shopping lists, dictionaries), writing at sentence level (captions for pictures, speech bubbles for cartoons, diaries) and writing at text level (advertisements, Christmas/birthday cards, invitations) (Ellis, 1991: 59).

When writing a story a learner has to "encapsulate meaning and express it in what/how he writes"; he has to be able to handle the so called "secretarial skills", the skill of construction or composition, the devices for discourse work, and the style of his writing (Garvie, 1990: 49-50).

Finally, making up a book of their own, represents a complex activity which engages all the children's abilities mentioned so far together with Art and craft (e.g., illustrations and lay-out). Such a book stands at the end of a long creative process, which connects children's interdisciplinary knowledge in the best way.

## From teaching experience

Several cross-curricular EFL activities will be presented here:

1. The acquisition of new structures *If I were (not) a/an...I would/could* using the song "*If I were a carpenter...*" and children's discussion about ceramic figures of animals and plants they made themselves.

2. The children's creation of an ecological poster while discussing contemporary environmental problems and possible solutions.

3. The children's invention of a story, that is a 21<sup>st</sup> century fairy-tale with an ecological topic, and the illustrations for the story.

### Grammar (Hypothetical condition), Art, Science, Environment, and Music

My original idea was to introduce the new structure *If I were a ...* by playing "*If I were a carpenter.*"

Since I unexpectedly could not get the cassette tape, I told children the starting lyrics. I changed the third line. This proved to be advantageous because it gave me the opportunity to use *If I were a...* structure in a real context. Then, I jumbled the three lines written on separate cards. The children were required to put the words into correct order:

*If I were a carpenter,  
and you were a lady,  
would you love me anyway...?*

“Unfortunately, I couldn’t find the cassette, but *If I were a fairy, I would get it, and you could hear the song.*”

(At the end of the lesson I could not resist singing the song myself, at least the part I know, since the reasons for using songs in FL teaching are too well-known).

After singing the lyrics I provided the full structure *If I were not a/an..., I would like to be an...(because) I could/would...* in order to initiate a discussion among the children about their favourite plants and animals:

“Well, I’m not a fairy, I’m a human. But *If I were not a human, I would like to be an olive tree because I could give people food and shelter.*”

The children had modelled their figures in clay during their two Art lessons in English. The Art learning aims were: learning about 3-dimensional form, increasing awareness of the variety of shapes and textures in the natural environment, and developing new skills in clay modelling.

After a week the figures were fired in a kiln. The ceramic elephants, turtles, trees, etc., were a result of English lessons integrated into Science, Environment, and Art. Prior to this exercise, the children’s comments were, for example, “I would like to be an elephant because it is big and strong, but it doesn’t do any harm to other animals.”

Now, their comments about the figures they made were formulated in this way:

“If I were not a human/boy/girl, I would like to be...

... an elephant because I would be big and strong, but wouldn’t do any harm to other animals.

... an oak tree. I could protect the soil and smaller plants from the hot sun, the wind and the heavy rain.

... a rose bush. I could help make the Earth a more beautiful place to live in.

... a crocodile. I could swim lazily in the river all day long.”

The children also made an apple tree, a mushroom, a dolphin, two fish, two dogs, three birds, two turtles, two lions, a cat, a hippo, a snail, a seal, a rabbit, a penguin, one more crocodile and two more elephants.

### **An ecological poster (Art and Environment)**

From first grade on, the children were gradually exposed to environmental topics, both by their class and English teacher. At first, Art, children’s literature and Science lessons were mostly used to reinforce their experiences in nature and deepen their appreciation of beauty and diversity of nature. In integrated EFL lessons they listened to stories like *The Tiny Little Seed* (Carle, 1987), *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1974) and *The Ugly Duckling* (Anderson, 1990). They did some interesting texts and exercises in *Click* magazines (MGM), such as a series “Animal Lovers” in 1993/94.

They also watched some video films such as *The Ugly Duckling* (Longman, 1982), and *My First Nature Video* (Dorling Kindersley, 1992-1994).

In their Art lessons in English they drew and painted flowers, butterflies, bees, the sky seen through the window, the trees in the school yard, etc., and modelled fruits and animals. With their class teacher they attended “The School in Nature” at the nearby mountain, and also a little seaside town.

Gradually they were more and more informed about environmental problems. They were shown, and partly read themselves, picture books such as: *The Ladybird Green Book* (Ganeri, 1992), *Ecology* (Ganeri, 1991), *Rescue Mission: Planet Earth* (Children of the World, 1994) and *The Young Green Consumer Guide* (Elkington, 1990). They found some useful vocabulary in a bilingual article in a Croatian magazine called TIN (Tomašević-Dančević, 1994). In that way they learned to “think ecologically” and to achieve the “new global environmental ethic” (UNESCO, 1991: 62).

Of course, at this age children are taught in an optimistic way. For example, how to make a contribution to their own environment. Problem-solving at the family and school level, as well as local problem-solving should be an essential part of the environmental education process.

So, besides their partly changed behaviour at home and school, on Earth day my pupils did some cleaning and gardening in the school yard with their teachers and parents. They also watched the very popular *Captain Planet* cartoons on the Cartoon Net/video tapes and promotional video cartoon, which helped them accept global norms of behaviour. *The World in Danger: Eco School* (Frankić, Hudek, Pirš & Spajić 1995).

For their group work on an ecological poster the children had to collect cut-outs from magazines and newspapers showing visual examples of air/water/earth pollution. Finally, each pupil could choose a picture connected with a problem s/he wanted to present to the class. All the “problems” were gradually compiled on a small picture of planet Earth placed at the bottom of the poster while at the top of the poster there was a message S.O.S.

The children’s comments included:

“We live in a beautiful world, but we often make a mess of it.

People throw away their rubbish everywhere.

Many thrown away things can’t decay if you bury them.

But the most of our day’s rubbish could be recycled.

We must not pollute rivers, lakes and seas.

We should buy phosphate-free cleaning powders and liquids.

We should keep wild places litter-free.

People should stop destroying trees, and especially rain forests.

We should not buy goods which use CFCs because these gases destroy the ozone layer round the Earth.

Let's help the Earth!"

As for the Art learning aims, they were: learning about design (making a poster, and the role of letters in a poster), learning about the composition of 2-dimensional forms, and developing new skills in cutting out and sticking.

### **Making up a story, creative writing, Environment, Art**

At the beginning of third grade my pupils were already accustomed to making up stories, as well as producing hand-made books. That is why we decided to enter the *JET Story competition*, opened at the end of the previous school year.

We worked on the story for about a month. First, we briefly reviewed all the well-known fairy tales. Then several children gave their suggestions for the topic of the story, but at this stage no coherent ideas emerged that could be used as a starting point.

I suggested an ecological fairy tale. Some of the questions to prompt children's creative thinking were: what could be some of the most serious environmental problems in the future; who could possibly be good or bad characters; where and how could they live: why should they be in conflicting relations, etc.

Furthermore, during this long creative process we used to play a sort of sequence simulation game. The children's first task was to plan an ecologically sound future country or town. The next task was to plan a technically superior but ecologically wasted country or town. The children then role-played the previously created characters, both in their own environments and in the gradually created or simulated conflict situations, the climax of which was the third battle for or against the eco land. (N.B., the actual war against Croatia made this last simulated situation more significant and realistic to the children.)

Using simulations and role-playing, some kind of *realistic conflict-of-interest situations* were brought into the classroom (UNESCO, 1991). In this way the pupils could themselves try to solve environmental problems. However, the distinctive characteristic of the described simulations was that my pupils' environmental decision-making process could include some solutions which are possible only in the reality of a fairy tale. Yet, this lack/advantage should not lessen the value of children's creative problem-solving process, since such *environmental management* still had its own firm logic. It also offered certain solutions to the problems which could be the optimistically possible predictions for the future.

As for the language the children used when role-playing the main characters, it was the language borrowed from their favourite stories. This was thought to be the magic language for communication in the world of fairy tales, and especially in the unknown

world of the simulated future. In a way fairy tale language connected the (imaginary) past with (possible) future, the well known with new adventures, but also the world of too complicated problems with the world of game. This made the children feel self-confident and independent in new situations.

At a certain stage of writing the simulation game the pupils tried, usually at home, some creative writing to give their own solutions to the given problem. However, it was me who did most of the writing in the whole process of making up the story. When the tale was finished, each of the 30 pupils made their own illustration for the chapter they liked best. The Art learning aims of the illustrations were: learning about form (presented by line and colour); learning about design (illustrating a story); stimulating imagination; developing new skills in drawing with coloured pencils and felt-tip pens.

The story won second prize. It was published and recorded in *The Battle for Greenland*. (The story is provided at the end of this chapter.)

## Conclusion

Teaching experience with primary school pupils described in this chapter is expected to prove the advantages of interdisciplinary teaching, and especially EFL teaching across the curriculum. The pupils get better language knowledge and more coherent integrated subject knowledge. The teaching/learning done in the classroom is linked to the real world. The pupils are also given more chance to develop their creative thinking. Such teaching makes them feel that learning a foreign language is connected with fun and pleasure, new experience, and action. In this way it motivates them to gain new knowledge. Simultaneously it helps them to develop their self-confidence, independence, and a critical mind.

### 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY FAIRY TALE

#### SECOND PRIZE: The Battle for Greenland

*Once upon a time, in a land far away there lived a good and wise king. He had a beautiful and intelligent daughter. The Princess loved computers, but she also loved nature.*

*The King ruled the happy and prosperous people. They all lived in small towns of glass towers. Each tower had its own system of solar energy. The noiseless floating trolleys ran all around. Everybody had their own harmless airship, airbike or air-roller-skates. They loved to go to their green parks and woods. In those days there was no other country with so many well preserved forests, lakes and rivers and so many animals. No other land had such fresh air and so much natural food. Other countries had scarcely any of these amenities. This is why everybody called this land Greenland.*

*In another part of the Earth there lived a bad and greedy king, who was a disguised wizard. He ruled a country with the highest technology in the world. His towns looked like big silver spaceships. His floating castle was the shape of an enormous crown covered in gold and jewels. He had a big army of powerful robots marching all around. They had conquered all the neighbouring countries. They piloted spaceships to the orbital stations and to the Moon, where they dug precious stones and minerals. The robots also did experiments with dangerous weapons and poisons.*

*In the Wizard's land there was not a single green plant left. He hated animals as well. His robots used his magic recipes to make food. They also made all sorts of pets. Instead of fountains and ponds with fresh water he had perfect glass illusions. Because of the experiments and lack of plants there was scarcely any oxygen in the air. Thus, his people had to live in a sort of astronaut suit all the time. That land was called Superland.*

*The Wizard had a magic mirror computer on his bedroom wall. He used to ask:*

*"Oh, mirror, mirror on the wall, which land's the fairest of them all?"*

*His mirror was programmed to reply:*

*"Oh, your Majesty, your land is the most beautiful of all."*

*But one day the mirror replied:*

*"Oh, your Majesty, your land is beautiful,  
but Greenland is more beautiful than yours."*

*The evil king got mad with anger and jealousy. He decided to conquer that country as well. He consulted his super-intelligent computers and robots. Then he sent his big robot army to Greenland in powerful war airships.*

*Fortunately the clever Princess, with the help of her computers, discovered the Wizard's secret war plans. A young and brave prince, who was in love with the Princess, came to help.*

*To the Wizard's great surprise his frightening army was defeated. He got more furious than before. He made up his mind to get Greenland at all costs. This time the Good King's army suffered great loss, but at the end the Wizard's troops were defeated again. His rage and jealousy overcame him. When he could not get Greenland, he raged, he must destroy it, once and forever. First he sent strong winds to Greenland which carried clouds of deadly poisonous smoke and rain.*

*The Prince and Princess knew that there wasn't much time left. They rode their fast airbikes to the Good Fairy, who lived in a wood. She was very old, with not much magic art left, but she agreed to help.*

*She made her spell:*

*"Abracadabra wheezy wo,  
I'll do a miracle to help you."*

*And that is just what she did. Suddenly there was an enormous spherical eco-shield all above the land. No poisons and power could pierce it. But the old Fairy warned them that the magic would stop working at midnight.*

*In no time the Wizard himself and his air force attacked Greenland. They fired their deadly weapons all day long, but with no effects. Yet, the Wizard and his black robot-knights did not want to give up. The clock was about to strike twelve. All at once there was a big explosion. The concentration of all the shells, gases and poisonous rays, which reflected from eco-shield, resulted in a terrible boomerang which returned to the invaders. The Wizard and his army turned into dust. The great whirlwind pushed them far away into space.*

*At that moment the spell broke, but only few bits of ash fell on Greenland. Its good luck acted as a message to all Earth's rulers to try to save their own environments. They were all invited to the wedding celebration in Greenland. The Prince and the Princess lived happily ever after.*

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