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Reading Picture Books in Preschool and Lower Grades of Primary School

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∞ This article introduces the results of a research survey that involved 443 preschool and classroom teachers. The objective of the investigation was to discover teachers' views on making picture book reading a part of the teaching process, how picture book reading was incorporated, and how a productive visual response to a picture book was designed. The results indicated that the surveyed teachers do consider picture books to be appropriate, not only for very young children, and they had no difficulties selecting an appropriate picture book. Half of the respondents noted that children or students visually expressed their impressions after reading a picture book. The replies also indicated that, as regards picture books within the teaching process, unused potential remains in terms of developing children's visual and multimodal literacy.

Keywords: picture book, multimodal text, visual literacy, preschool teachers, classroom teachers

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Branje slikanic v vrtcu in nižjih razredih osnovne šole

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☞ V članku predstavljamo izsledke raziskave, ki je vključevala 443 vzgojiteljev in učiteljev razrednega pouka. Namen anketiranja vzgojiteljev in razrednih učiteljev je bil ugotoviti, kakšna so stališča vprašanih glede branja slikanic v pedagoškem procesu, kako poteka branje slikanic in kako je zasnovan produktivni likovni odziv na prebrano slikanico. Rezultati kažejo na to, da vprašani prepoznavajo slikanico kot knjigo, ki ni primerna le za mlajše otroke, in da brez težav izberejo kakovostno slikanico. Polovica vprašanih navaja tudi, da otroci oz. učenci po branju slikanic svoje vtise likovno izrazijo. Odgovori vprašanih pa kažejo tudi na to, da je slikanica v pedagoškem procesu še neizkoriščen potencial z vidika razvijanja vizualne in multimodalne pismenosti.

Ključne besede: slikanica, multimodalno besedilo, vizualna pismenost, vzgojitelji, učitelji razrednega pouka

Introduction

Reading picture books in the preschool period and lower grades of primary school, accompanied by a productive visual response to what was read and seen, can be an excellent starting point for developing one's visual and multimodal literacy. Riddle (2009, p. 7) notes:

Just as reading complements writing in traditional literacy, observation and creation jointly form the foundation of visual literacy [...] As teachers, our job is to help students do more than merely look at symbols; we must show them how to interpret and communicate the meaning of images, to develop 'intelligent vision.

Picture books are a special type of book, combining the verbal and the visual codes of communication. According to Haramija (2017, p. 28), picture books are an intermediate stage between comic books, which focus on visual elements, and illustrated books, which focus on the text. In classic picture books, such as *Maček Muri (Magic Muri)* by Kajetan Kovič and Jelka Reichman (1975) or *Muca Copatarica (Slipper Keeper Kitty)* by Ela Peroci and Ančka Gošnik Godec (1957), the information carried by the text is normally also included in the illustration. We can only rarely find a character that is not mentioned in the text. Some contemporary picture books include distinctly postmodern elements, such as nonlinearity, self-referential text, sarcastic or self-mocking tones, and an anti-authoritarian stance (Goldstone, 2001). In an analysis of Slovenian picture books with postmodern elements, we noted that two elements, in particular, stood out, namely a close interaction between the verbal and the visual (both of them complementing and upgrading each other) and intertextuality, which is a prerequisite for the multiple meanings of a picture book (cf. Haramija & Batič, 2014). The most extreme form of picture book is one that is entirely without text except for instances such as the title, as in the book *Wave* by Suzy Lee (2011), *Maruška Potepuška (Maruška's Adventures)* by Marjan Amalietti (1977), *Brundo se igra (Grumbly is Playing)* by Marjan Manček (1978), a really brief text such as the introductory verse by Edgar Allan Poe in the picture book *Zgodba o sidru (The Story of the Anchor)* by Damijan Stepančič (2010), a longer text on the back cover as in *Ferdo—veliki ptič (Ferdo—The Giant Bird)* by Andreja Peklar (2016), or an intra-iconic text as in *Deček in hiša (A Boy and a House)* by Maja Kastelic (2015).

The relation between text and illustration is an essential aspect of picture book analysis. Nikolajeva (2003) has dissected the word-image interaction into several stages, ranging from symmetry to contradiction. Sipe (1998) speaks not

only of interaction between these two parts but also of transaction (the text defines the meaning of the illustrations and vice versa). Lewis (2006, p. 36) writes about text-image inter-animation:

[...] words breathe life into the image. They frame the image for the reader by directing attention, and offering interpretation. [...] The words clearly mean something we can understand, but on their own the words are attenuated, partial, and they only come fully to life and gain their complete meaning within the story when read alongside the accompanying picture.

Serafini (2014) characterises picture books as so-called multimodal ensembles. Three key elements of printed multimodal ensembles are text, visual imagery (photographs, drawings, pictures, charts, tables), and design (edges, typography, other graphic elements) (Serafini, 2014, p. 13). He pays special attention to communication codes being wrongfully understood as separate entities of the whole (Serafini, 2014, p. 54):

In many classrooms in which I have been involved in research projects, the image and written text have been understood as separate entities trying to do the same work. I have heard teachers asking students whether they liked the pictures better than the text, whether they learned more from the words or from the images, or whether they would like to add words to a wordless picture book. [...] It is important to remember that one mode is not inherently better than another; they simply do different things in different ways.

Reading picture books

Reading a picture book is reading a multimodal text that has specific features and functions:

The function of pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or represent. The function of words, conventional signs, is primarily to narrate. Conventional signs are often linear, while iconic signs are nonlinear and do not give direct instruction about how to read them (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1–2).

Serafini (2014) formed a special framework to help teachers support their students' experience with multimodal text, which is organised in three stages: exposure, exploration, and engagement. The concept of the framework enables a gradual shift of the responsibility from teacher to student 'as students

gain experience working with various multimodal ensembles and visual images' (Serafini, 2014, p. 91). The first phase focuses on students being exposed to a variety of multimodal texts, or 'ensembles,' as Serafini refers to them. Serafini (2014, pp. 92–93) notes that:

[...] students need to read a variety of multimodal ensembles from a viewpoint of a reader, before they can read them from a perspective of a writer. [...] The exposure phase provides the foundation for the further exploration of the various textual, visual, and design elements and structures of multimodal ensembles that will occur in the next phase.

The second phase is dedicated to the exploration of individual elements. The first step in this phase is about 'the development of a specific vocabulary or metalanguage for discussing and analysing the textual, visual, and design elements in particular multimodal ensembles' (Serafini, 2014, p. 93). For example, learning the vocabulary required for analysing a picture book implies becoming familiar with terms such as front cover, flyleaf, inside cover, text, visual language elements, composition, focus, viewpoint, and others. It is necessary to note that children need enough time to explore individual elements. Arzipe and Styles determined in their study that 'older children are not used to having time to look at a book slowly. Because they read so fast, they sometimes missed details which they only saw when they were pointed out' (2003, p. 192).

The final phase involves students producing, with the help of the teacher (supporting them mostly in the use of less familiar tools), a multimodal text of their own, using the elements they have been introduced to. Serafini notes (2014, pp. 94–95):

In this phase, students are required to make choices concerning the design, production, and distribution of their visual images and multimodal texts. [...] The engagement phase allows students to demonstrate and make visible what they have learned, and forces them to consider the audiences and purposes for their creations, not simply the medium used in its creation.

Doonan (1993) has developed a model for reading picture books in class. She regards the use of picture books in the teaching process (Doonan, 1993, p. 48) 'as part of an education in developing a visual sense generally and being able to make meaning from visual information in particular'. She has adjusted her model to older students (12 to 14 years of age), dividing it into eight stages: (1) introduction, (2) conversation about different codes, (3) students are introduced to working vocabulary, (4) visual investigations (learning about the

characteristics of various media and visual elements), (5) continuation of visual investigations (learning about composition and the relations among different visual elements), (6) relation between word and image, (7) reading the picture book, (8) students write about a picture book (Doonan, 1993, pp. 50–59).

The showcased model has been designed for older students, but it can be modified for use with younger students as well. In her case study involving 22 students aged seven and eight, Sylvia Pantaleo (2016) investigated how a child's understanding of the elements of visual art and design affected their understanding, interpretation, and analysis of illustrations in picture books. Through a number of selected picture books, children learned about colours, colour mixing, various art techniques, the meaning of viewpoint and focus, typography, and picture book structure. The results of the survey showed that:

the students interpreted the elements of visual art and design as conveying information about the plot (events and conflicts), the characters' affective states, and the mood or atmosphere of events. As well, the students noted how the elements under study: communicated meaning symbolically [...] emphasized the importance of a character, object, event or action by focusing the reader's attention; enhanced the appreciation/understanding of characters' actions and their words; and communicated information about character relationship'. (Pantaleo, 2016, p. 248)

Picture books and visual literacy

Reading and understanding picture books are closely related to visual literacy. Reading picture books differs from reading non-illustrated texts, as 'reading' illustrations requires becoming regularly familiar with the visual language vocabulary. Depending on their developmental stage, children and students learn how the elements of visual art and design change the meaning of the text and affect the interpretation of a story, and how, on the other hand, the text influences the interpretation of illustrations. Children and students looking passively at the illustrations in a picture book will not be able to understand and interpret the book as a multimodal text. A research survey among second-grade students (Prior et al., 2012, p. 202) on how illustrations affect the understanding of literary characters showed that students made their judgements of the literary character based on 'facial expressions, body posture, and character actions depicted in illustrations, as well as their understanding of the way that illustrators use color and line to convey character information'. However, the students missed some important elements, such as 'the use of positionality to convey character information [...] children did not make mention of the

symbols illustrators embedded in illustrations or the use of artistic devices of changing the size of a character and showing a character breaking the frame surrounding an illustration' (Prior et al., 2012, pp. 202–203).

The following section is a summary of recommendations for reading multimodal texts such as picture books with younger students. These recommendations were developed as a result of a one-year project involving first-graders, two first-grade teachers, and two university researchers (Martens et al., 2012):

- Foster cooperation between the classroom teacher and the school art teacher.
- Conduct thorough preparation prior to reading picture books with children (the classroom teacher must be well acquainted with the elements of visual art and design, understand the relation between text and image, etc.).
- Include illustrations in the discussion about the picture book (discuss colours, lines, layout, the effect of illustrations on understanding the literary character, which information the child received from illustrations alone and which from the text, etc.).
- Encourage students to talk about their artwork, elaborating on their decisions and choices (e.g., the choice of colours, lines).

Understanding and interpreting visual images are only one part of visual literacy, the other one being the ability to share information visually. Tomšič Čerkez (2015, p. 5) notes:

The ability to analyse and interpret images and other visual material, although critical, is not sufficient in itself; it must be accompanied by an ability to create visual material, in order to use a specific language that allows the individual to consider synthesised images that stimulate hybrid sensitive experiences and operative experiences in a holistic way.

A literary work that is not illustrated can be a good starting point for artistic expression. Artistic expression based on picture books must allow a productive response of children to the text and/or illustrations in a picture book. A picture book can also be used as a basis for planning various visual arts activities and tasks, as it can be used to select the art motif, technique, art problem, or as an encouragement for children to create their own picture books (cf. Batič, 2017). Artistic expression in response to picture book reading, however, can also serve as a means for children to learn about the structure of the picture book as a multimodal text and about art techniques and text-image relation. Children and students can first write the text (younger children being assisted by their teachers), divide it into separate pages (the easiest way is to

make a folded booklet), and then produce the illustrations. Throughout this process, they investigate which pieces of information they will provide through illustration and which through text, and how the interaction between the text and the illustrations will affect their message. Younger children start designing their picture book 'to understand that constructing meaning when reading picture books involves reading both the art and the written text, that each provides information that may or may not be represented in the other' (Martens et al., 2012, p. 289). Reading picture books and artistic production following such reading is, in fact, cross-curricular integration of literature and art. What pertains to the domain of visual arts is the identification of the meaning from high-quality illustrations (which is closely related to the reception of an artwork) and the artistic expression. For this reason, we can speak of specific art education methods that need to be integrated into any discussion about picture books. Tomljenović (2015, p. 78) notes:

The use of specific (visual arts) methods includes: aesthetic communication between teachers, students and artworks; perception and understanding of visual arts phenomena and patterns, as well as their connection with everyday life; and the independent and creative use of visual arts materials.

Research problem and research questions

Reading and interpreting picture books in preschool or in elementary school is in the domain of learning about literature. Although picture books are very popular among children and teachers, the focus is mainly on the words. Pictures are considered less important and are usually not included in the process of picture book interpretation.

Our main research question was to examine the views of preschool and classroom teachers on the ways picture books are integrated into the teaching process. We were particularly interested in the following questions:

- (1) Are picture books appropriate for younger children in particular?
- (2) What is the attitude of pre-schoolers and students towards picture books?
- (3) Do elementary school and preschool teachers experience difficulties in selecting a quality picture book?
- (4) How are picture book reading and discussion conducted?
- (5) What do elementary school and preschool teachers feel about including picture books without text into their teaching practice?

- (6) How do elementary school and preschool teachers normally motivate children to read picture books?
- (7) What is a normal artistic response after reading a picture book?

We were also interested in discovering any statistically significant differences between the responses of preschool teachers and those of elementary school teachers.

Sample

Our survey sample included all teachers and preschool teachers from all statistical regions of Slovenia. We sent our request for participation in an online survey to e-mail addresses of preschools and elementary schools, which are available on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia. Elementary school and preschool teachers who participated in our survey did so voluntarily. We obtained a total of 443 complete questionnaire replies.

Participants

Questionnaires were answered by 435 female (98.2%) and eight male (1.8%) teachers. Slightly over half of the respondents (52.8%) were preschool teachers working in preschools, and the rest (47.2%) were classroom teachers working in primary schools. The largest portion of the respondents had 20 or more years of work experience (41.5%), followed by teachers with between 10 and 20 years of experience (27.8%) and those with under five years of experience (16.3%). The smallest number of responding teachers had between five and 10 years of experience (14.4%). As regards their education level, most had a university degree or higher (73.4%), followed by those with a secondary-school degree (14.2%) and a short-cycle higher education degree (12.4%).

Instruments

An online questionnaire was designed. It was examined by two practitioners (a preschool teacher and a classroom teacher). The survey was conducted from April to June 2017.

The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The respondents were offered 14 statements concerning the use of picture books in the teaching process along with a set of possible answers (strongly disagree, disagree, do not know or cannot decide, agree, strongly agree) and some open-ended questions. The results were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution) and inferential statistics (χ^2 test).

Results and discussion

Are picture books appropriate predominantly for younger children?

One of the statements included in the questionnaire was 'Picture books are appropriate predominantly for younger children.' Of the respondents, 43.1% disagreed with the statement, and 29.1% strongly disagreed with it. A small percentage agreed (18.1%) or strongly agreed (6.8%) with the statement. The portion of the teachers who responded that they did not know or could not decide was negligible (2.9%). The results of the χ^2 test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses based on where the teachers work. As many as 35.5% of the responding preschool teachers strongly disagreed with the statement that picture books were appropriate predominantly for younger children, whereas only 11.0% of the responding classroom teachers shared this opinion ($\chi^2 = 26.904$; $P = .000$). The picture book is an important form of the books used in preschools and the lower grades of primary school. Preschool teachers and school teachers recognise that this book form is not intended solely for younger children. In their visual elements, good picture books normally provide a rich context that needs to be 'read'. Even when the narrative is primarily intended for younger children, the visual aspects (i.e., the illustrations with their motifs, symbols, spatial relations, and the characters they introduce) provide further details that can be understood by older readers. One such example is a picture book by Nina Kokelj and Svjetlan Junaković (2006), *Deček na belem oblaku* (*The Boy on the White Cloud*). The first one-sided illustration depicts a boy supporting his head. Next to him, there is a vase with orange flowers and a clock, which is a still-life motif. The flowers in the illustration resemble dried orange lanterns, which have a crucial role in Japanese tradition honouring ancestors' spirits, while the clock symbolises the passing of time. Thus, the illustrator arouses the feeling of the boy's upcoming death as early as in the first illustration, through dull colours, proportions (the boy's big head is leaning on his tiny and fragile hand), and symbols. The text next to the illustration speaks of a boy named Domen, who is looking sadly at a white cloud outside his window and does not notice anything else (cf. Haramija & Batič, 2013).

What is the attitude of pre-schoolers and students towards picture books?

A majority of the respondents agreed (24.8%) or strongly agreed (72.5%) with the statement that children or students liked picture books very much. The share of other responses was negligible (0.2% of respondents strongly disagreed,

1.1% disagreed, and 1.4% did not know or could not decide). The answers from our respondents indicate that children and students like picture books very much. Their answers were, in fact, expected, as the narratives in picture books normally address the topics that children can relate to or in which they are interested. The visual part of the picture book allows children to 'read' it before they can actually read the text. The picture book may also captivate children due to its special design features, for example, a book with movable parts.

Do elementary school and preschool teachers experience difficulties in selecting a quality picture book?

Nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) agreed with the statement that they had no difficulties selecting a good picture book, with over a fifth of the teachers (21.2%) strongly agreeing with the statement. The portion of the respondents who did not know or could not decide on the matter was slightly lower (15.8%), and even fewer teachers disagreed (11.7%) or strongly disagreed (1.6%) with the statement that it was easy for them to select a good picture book. While these answers are promising, we cannot fully support them with the answers that the respondents provided to the third open-ended question, in which they were asked to name the picture book that they had discussed most recently. They did provide the titles but omitted the authors and years of publication. With titles such as *Trnjulčica* (*Sleeping Beauty*), we could not make any judgements regarding the quality of the book, as there are a number of picture books with the same title, which vary considerably in quality. In her diploma thesis, Kalšek (2016) analysed 12 picture books of the fairy tale *Trnjulčica* (*Sleeping Beauty*) that were published between 1954 and 2014. While the storyline in all of them is very similar, the books differ substantially in the quality of the illustrations. The importance of picture book quality is highlighted among others by Saksida (2017, p. 51), who notes that the basic principle in selecting a book is the quality of the text and the illustrations. When judging the quality of illustrations, the authors of book recommendation lists, preschool teachers, and classroom teachers can refer to visual and content-related criteria as defined by Zupančič in his article titled 'Kakovostna književna ilustracija za otroke' ['Quality book illustration for children'] (2012).

How are picture book reading and discussion conducted?

Most respondents agreed (35.2%) or strongly agreed (60.5%) with the statement that they discussed the text with children after having read it. The share of the primary school teachers who strongly agreed was 77%, and the share of the preschool teachers was 45.7%. There is a statistically significant

difference between their answers ($\chi^2 = 46.950$; $P = .000$). A majority of all respondents strongly disagreed (30.2%) or disagreed (47.4%) with the statement that illustrations were shown to the children or students only after reading the picture book text. However, nearly a fourth of the respondents stated the contrary: 12.2% agreed, and 3.6% strongly agreed with the statement that illustrations were shown only after the text had been read. The share of those who did not know or could not decide was 6.6%. Most of the responding teachers confirmed that illustrations were shown while the book was being read: 35.2% agreed and 40.9% strongly agreed with the statement. In contrast, 14.4% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, though only 1.1% strongly disagreed with it. Again, few of the respondents replied that they did not know or could not decide (8.4%).

As regards the statement that the main objective of the illustrations in picture books was to attract children's attention, opinions were varied: 40.4% disagreed with the statement, 27.8% agreed, 14.4% did not know or could not decide, 13.8% strongly agreed with the statement, and 3.6% strongly disagreed with it. Reading picture books requires reading the text as well as meticulous observation of the illustrations. It also requires readers to read the book several times, as they need to interpret the information from the text with the help of the illustrations, while at the same time the information from the text helps interpret the illustrations. The illustrations can, in fact, substantially change the morphological features of the text, so the reader's observation cannot be passive (cf. Batič & Haramija, 2015; Haramija & Batič, 2013). The main purpose of an illustration is not to attract the attention of children or teachers but rather to co-create the meaning of the story.

What do elementary school and preschool teachers feel about including picture books without text into their teaching practice?

Concerning the statement that picture books without text were more appropriate for pre-schoolers than for school children, the results were as follows: 44.2% of the respondents disagreed, and 22.6% strongly disagreed with the statement, 17.6% did not know or could not decide, while 13.3% agreed and 2.3% strongly agreed with the statement. A great many respondents occasionally used picture books without text in their classroom work. The share of the respondents who agreed and strongly agreed with this statement was 52.8% and 21.0%, respectively, while 14.0% of the respondents disagreed with it, 7.7% did not know or could not decide, and 4.5% strongly disagreed. The results of the χ^2 test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of the primary school teachers and those of the preschool teachers.

The share of the preschool teachers who strongly agreed with the statement that they occasionally included picture books without any text in their teaching practice was 27.8%, while that of the primary school teachers was only 13.4% ($\chi^2 = 24.856$; $P = .000$). The open-ended question was designed to identify the most recent picture books that the responding classroom and preschool teachers discussed in class or with children. We were particularly curious as to whether the list would include picture books without text. The question was answered by 77.4% of the preschool teachers and 77% of the classroom teachers. No picture book without text was named.

How do elementary school and preschool teachers normally motivate children to read picture books?

The goal of using open-ended questions was to examine how the investigated preschool teachers and classroom teachers motivated children or students to read picture books. We were interested in determining what teaching methods were used by the teachers to motivate children to read picture books. The answers of the classroom teachers and the preschool teachers were analysed separately. The respondents named a number of such methods. We grouped their answers into categories, presenting them with frequencies. Our main point of interest was to discover what share of the answers would be dealing directly with the visual part of picture books (i.e., the illustrations).

Based on the answers of the preschool teachers, we defined the following categories:

- (1) No reply (23.5%)
- (2) Motivation not required, as a picture book is a sufficient motivation in itself (23%)
- (3) Motivation by means of a puppet (14.5%)
- (4) Motivation through play (riddles) (10.3%)
- (5) Motivation not required (7.3%)
- (6) Motivation through a discussion of the topic (6.4%)
- (7) Motivation by the setup of the reading area (5.5%)
- (8) Motivation by singing (4.7%)
- (9) Motivation by discussing the front cover or an illustration from the picture book (4.3%)

The categories based on the answers by the classroom teachers were as follows:

- (1) No reply (22.9%)
- (2) Motivation through play (riddles, wordplay, didactic games) (26.3%)

- (3) Motivation through a discussion of the topic (21%)
- (4) Motivation by discussing the front cover or an illustration from the picture book (8.1%)
- (5) Motivation by singing (4.8%)
- (6) Motivation by means of a puppet (3.8%).

Based on the answers provided by the surveyed preschool and classroom teachers, we can conclude that children and students are mainly motivated to read picture books through various activities, such as games, songs, and or playing with toys. Only a minor share of the respondents reported that they motivate the children or students solely with the picture book, with the illustrations, or above all with the front cover. We can also conclude that the respondents are not aware of the importance of a book's front cover in the process of motivating children to read picture books. The objective of the book's front cover is to attract readers' attention, arouse curiosity, set the mood, and other factors.

What is a normal artistic response after reading a picture book?

In the study, we were interested in collecting information on artistic response to the picture book. Over half of the respondents agreed (48.8%) or strongly agreed (8.8%) with the statement that children or students normally produced drawings after reading a picture book, capturing their impressions of the book in question. Of the respondents, 20.3% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed with the statement, but 19.6% did not know or could not decide. The results of the χ^2 test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of the preschool teachers and those of the primary school teachers ($\chi^2 = 45.675$; $P = .000$). Of the responding primary school teachers, 58.9% agreed with the statement, but the percentage of preschool teachers who agreed was only 39.7%. While 13.9% of the primary school teachers strongly agreed with the statement, the equivalent share of the preschool teachers was only 4.3%.

We also designed an open-ended question in the attempt to determine whether the discussion of the most recent picture book our respondents read with their children/students included visual response to the picture book. The answers provided by the responding preschool teachers ($n = 234$) were divided into categories, as follows: (1) No reply (22.6%), (2) No, children were not encouraged to visually represent their responses (44.4%), (3) Yes, children were encouraged to visually represent their responses (33%). The answers of the classroom teachers ($n = 209$) were classified into the same categories: (1) No reply (23%), (2) No, children were not encouraged to visually represent their responses (14.8%), (3) Yes, children were encouraged to visually represent their

responses (62.2%). The share of the classroom teachers who encouraged their students to provide visual representations was greater than the share of the preschool teachers who included children's visual representation in picture book discussions. The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 52.0466$; $P < .00001$).

As we were particularly interested in visual representations of children's responses to picture books, we further classified the teachers who encouraged children to visually represent their responses ($n = 77$) into three categories, as follows: (1) The type of visual response is not specified (31.2%), (2) Children represent/reproduce the motif from the picture book discussed (e.g., their favourite part) (35%), (3) The visual response involves their reaction to the picture book (e.g., children represent a different ending of the narrative, featuring themselves as the main characters) (25.4%). After reading a picture book with children or students, one needs to discuss it with them. The share of primary school teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement was greater than the share of preschool teachers who thought the same. This indicates that the purpose of reading picture books in preschool is different from that in school. The same is true for visual response to reading. The portion of the school teachers who agreed that students normally draw their impressions after reading a picture book is statistically greater than the share of preschool teachers who felt this way.

A problem that we regularly see in practice is children copying their favourite illustrations. Visual responses are frequently not designed as targeted visual art assignments but are instead a mere copying of a certain motif. Over a third of the responding preschool teachers (35%), as well as a large portion of the school teachers (43.1%) answering the question regarding visual responses to a picture book, replied that children depicted or reproduced their favourite motif from the picture book. About a third of the preschool teachers and slightly over a fourth of the school teachers mentioned a productive response to the picture book (e.g., children representing a different ending to the story). Kordigel Aberšek (2008) notes that after reading, children will represent their imaginary and sensory perception of a literary character in a drawing. Drawings or other kinds of representation are considered a method with which we search our path towards a deeper understanding of a literary text (p. 269). Kordigel Aberšek further notes (p. 269) that the objective of illustrating a specific literary motif, for example, is not the same as in art education, which focuses on encouraging individuals and developing their skills of artistic expression. Instead, it is only a method with which we can bring children to develop a richer imaginary and sensory perception and thus a more intense visual and aesthetic experience. However, one needs to be aware that a representation of an imaginary and sensory perception in the school environment cannot be completely devoid of the principles of visual art didactics.

Students who are instructed to draw or paint their imaginary and sensory perception of a certain literary motif will, of course, need suitable art material as well as a properly designed art task. The teacher is the one who needs to be the judge of which is the one specific material (or visual medium) that will enable the students to create their own visual representations of a specific literary motif. For example, in the case of a motif for which the visual representation requires the use of colours, a pencil drawing is surely an inappropriate choice. It makes little sense to expect that a student can show his or her deeper understanding of a literary text by expressing his or her ideas through a visual medium if the latter is not chosen properly. Thus, a crucial aspect that needs to be considered is how to integrate art into other curricular areas and use its potential to improve learning in a specific school subject, without having any second thoughts about neglecting the basic principles of art didactics.

Conclusion

Reading picture books has several functions within the learning process. One of the more important ones is the development of multimodal literacy (i.e., the ability to read the meanings of different communication codes), thus creating new summative meanings. The usual picture book reading, which in practice implies reading the text along with a passive display of the illustrations, does not allow for integrated reading. The meanings are discerned only to some extent and are therefore incomplete. A productive response to picture book reading used with younger children is frequently of a visual nature, but as our survey results show, it tends to be entirely wrong in its concept (e.g., children copy their favourite motif).

A generalisation of the survey results is limited due to non-coincidental sampling: the questionnaire with our request for participation was sent to all Slovenian preschools and elementary schools, but only some of the teachers responded. Given the subject of our survey, we can assume that the data obtained is biased in a positive direction, meaning that it is more likely that the preschool teachers and elementary school teachers who decided to participate in our survey were the ones that have more experience with regards to picture books being included in the teaching process.

Considering the results of the survey, we believe that it is imperative that further research should be conducted. In the future, we should design and verify a new model (in accordance with the findings of Frank Serafini) of picture book reading within the teaching-learning process, which would support the following:

- Interdisciplinary concept (to include goals both from literature and the fine arts),
- Development and use of vocabulary from the fine arts, and
- Development of multimodal literacy.

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