

## Multimodal Approach to Foster the Multiliteracies Pedagogy in the Teaching of EFL through Picturebooks: *The Snow Lion*

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Twenty-first-century language education involves paying attention to the multimodal pedagogical demands of a global digital world. To this end, effective English language teaching (ELT) requires preparation on the part of instructors in terms of consciously guiding learners' literacy development and integrating multiple modes of creating meaning that are broader than language alone. This article supports the notion of literacy as a multidimensional concept and proposes a multimodal toolkit as a means for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) to work with key literary and visual elements. Focusing on the reading of *The Snow Lion* (Helmore and Jones 2017), we discuss the meaningful interaction between words and images that defines picturebooks and implement the multiliteracies pedagogy approach, which is comprised of four knowledge processes, i.e., experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying. The final objective is to guide young students to produce meaning and think critically in the EFL classroom through the analysis and interpretation of picturebooks.

Keywords: multimodality; multiliteracies; EFL teaching; picturebooks

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## Un enfoque multimodal para fomentar la pedagogía de las multiliteracidades en la enseñanza de ILE a través de los álbumes ilustrados: *The Snow Lion*

Enseñar lenguas en el siglo veintiuno implica prestar atención a las demandas pedagógicas multimodales de un mundo digital global. Para alcanzar este objetivo, la enseñanza efectiva del inglés requiere una preparación de los instructores para guiar de manera consciente

el desarrollo de la literacidad de los alumnos e integrar las distintas maneras de construir significado que van mucho más allá del mero uso de la lengua. Este artículo suscribe la noción de literacidad como un concepto multidimensional y propone un conjunto de herramientas multimodales como medio para que los maestros de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) trabajen con elementos literarios y visuales clave. Centrándonos en la lectura de *The Snow Lion* (Helmore and Jones 2017), analizamos la relación característica entre palabras e imágenes que define el álbum ilustrado e implementamos la pedagogía de las multiliteracidades, que consta de cuatro procesos de conocimiento, esto es, experimentar, conceptualizar, analizar y aplicar. El objetivo final es guiar a jóvenes estudiantes en la producción de significados y en el pensamiento crítico en el marco del aula de ILE a través del análisis e interpretación de los álbumes ilustrados.

Palabras clave: multimodalidad; multiliteracidades; enseñanza de ILE; álbum ilustrado

Our challenge is to teach our students to read  
not only the word but also the world.  
(Kern 2000, 1)

Slow looking is a mode of learning.  
(Tishman 2018, 2)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While there is no question that teaching and learning approaches must evolve to meet the current and ever-changing educational needs of the twenty-first century, the aim of guiding young students towards building knowledge remains paramount (Kalantzis and Cope 2008; MacKenzie and Bathurst-Hunt 2018). In a digital world where technology has launched a new era of human empowerment, information can be accessed, received and exchanged easily. However, that does not mean that knowledge can be created or produced efficiently. Being exposed to multiple pieces of information does not guarantee learning from them or even comprehending them, unless all the pieces can be ordered and processed coherently in a global meaningful sense. As the sociologist Manuel Castells points out, the Internet has shaken our world. We now live in a “timeless time” that lacks a past, a future or a sequence: everything revolves around the “now” and a sense of immediate access (2013, 50). Our contemporary universe is global, digital and highly complex. Newly created on-screen reading dynamics now govern the management of our time (Greenfield 2015).

In many cases, as Mervyn Eyre asserts, “the opportunity for users to fulfill the need for social interaction, entertainment and learning is almost equal to the risk of impairment to cognitive, emotional and behavioral development and even mental health issues” (2017). This new scenario underscores the importance of understanding the role digital technology plays in shaping culture and education, and how it affects both the human brain (Small and Vorgan 2008) and the predisposition of human attention to exist in a state of being permanently connected. Linda Stone refers to this as “continuous partial attention,” which means that someone is continuously disrupted or occupied, tuned in to everything without focusing on anything concrete (2013). As a result, Stone explains, the brain creates new neuronal pathways (Greenfield 2015; Palfrey and Gasser 2016). The effect of these shifts demands that twenty-first-century teachers adopt new didactic multimodal approaches to engage learners and provide them, first, with a malleable ordered path combining linguistic and visual skills to organize information, and, second, with the literacy necessary to make sense of it. In this article, we propose that this type of cross-media education (Trifonas 2017) should also be part of the foreign language (FL) class. As Richard Kern points out, the literacy-based approach “represents a style of teaching [we] ought to consider if [we] wish to prepare learners for full participation in societies that increasingly

demand multilingual, multicultural and multitextual competence” (2000, 15). By focusing not only on language but also on guiding students to construct meaning and “on the effects and communicative consequences that particular texts can have for different audiences, teachers can clear a path to new levels of understanding of language, culture and communication” (Kern 2000, 16).

Likewise, another important claim of this approach for the teaching of a FL is to merge the goals of communicative competence of the beginner and intermediate levels with those of the critical thinking of advanced courses, and thus attain integration and coherence in the curriculum (López-Sánchez 2009). Today the relevance of this perspective is such that it is possible to find a number of FL departments that are in the process of rethinking their teaching approaches and curricula in order to redefine their goals and implement a multiliteracies-oriented program that overcomes the “language versus content” divide. For instance, the Department of German at Georgetown University undertook this challenge two decades ago and since then a significant number of scholars have focused their research on this ongoing line of study. In fact, in numerous articles and books (Kern 2000; Swaffar and Arens 2005; López-Sánchez 2009; Paesani, Willis and Dupuy 2016; Warner and Dupuy 2017, among others), there is a call for the integration of multiliteracies practices in the teaching and learning of FLs.

To this end, we propose here a multimodal toolkit that comprises four knowledge processes—a) experiencing, b) conceptualizing, c) analyzing, and d) applying—as a means of implementing the multiliteracies pedagogy approach in EFL teaching. The four processes are part of what is known as the “knowledge processes framework” (New London Group (NLG) 1996; Kalantzis et al. 2016; Menke and Paesani 2019). Developing reflective practices and focusing on teaching multimodal strategies that allow young learners to use the FL to communicate, but also to think and to discuss a wide variety of texts across disparate emerging new media forms, is an essential focus for teachers. While a student’s abilities to do these two things will understandably differ depending on their age, previous literacy level, cultural environment and other factors, the goal is to apply the pedagogy of multiliteracies by adapting it to the language level of each student in order to facilitate their multimodal learning. As Kate Paesani et al. emphasize, “one becomes literate; literacy is a process rather than a product” (2016, 12). Providing learners with the opportunity to foster their thinking along with speaking, reading, viewing, listening and writing skills requires frequent and deliberate practice that must be adjusted to fit their potential level of performance.

Our multimodal approach is thus intended to serve both experienced and preservice teachers. While our aim in teacher training for higher education is to work with the latter, we believe it can be useful for all types of teachers who wish to assume the role of facilitator in guiding students’ literacy development in primary and secondary education. According to Andrew Pollard, “effective teaching depends on teacher learning” (2014, 109). Similarly, effective literacy teaching depends to a great extent on

the training of teachers to conceptualize education—specifically, in this case, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL)—as facilitating meaning making as opposed to a process of transmission of knowledge (Ausubel 1968; Kern 2000; Gibbons 2006; Reyes-Torres 2017). In this article, the examples provided are aimed at preservice primary EFL teachers with the intention that they reflect on them and adapt them to use in the classroom. As will be shown, the tasks are designed for learners who are between 9 and 11 years old and already have a basic understanding of English—they have achieved A1 level according to the CEFR and are progressing to A2.

Teaching EFL requires learning about and paying attention to the blend of sociocultural, visual and linguistic elements that come together to create a multimodal text (Kress 2010; Brisk 2015; Serafini 2017). This multidimensional training empowers teachers to follow a multimodal approach and help students identify these same elements in texts they look at, read and write. In this respect, it is important to highlight that throughout this article the term *text* does not solely apply to a narrative discourse, but rather to a wide range of media products and modes of meaning making such as images, films, music videos, advertisements, and so on (Cope and Kalantzis 2000; Stafford 2011). Given the saturated multimedia universe and multiple stimuli that learners are continually exposed to, teachers need to accept that the traditional structure of a written text—sequential and linear—no longer adequately serves learners when it comes to organizing information and constructing meaning. EFL teachers, for this reason, must learn how to work with different types of text and how to introduce reading in the FL by using a multimodal approach that allows students to develop key aspects of literacy, reflect individually or in groups on the different elements that the text presents and, ultimately, think critically and convey their ideas.

## 2. LITERACY AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

An emphasis on the development of literacy as a fluid concept (Knobel and Lankshear 2014) is one of the most recent advances in twenty-first-century education. To conceptualize literacy, the ability of the learner to make use of language takes precedence in typical Western educational systems. However, as Kern highlights, “literacy is more than a set of academic skills” (2000, 23). It varies depending on the social context and is embedded in cultural practice (Paesani et al. 2016). Therefore, in order to define it, we must take into consideration the set of resources, sociocultural practices and competences—beyond reading and writing—that enable student interaction, critical thinking, the drawing of conclusions and the application of knowledge to curricular areas and real-world situations (New London Group 1996; Kern 2000; *American Association of School Librarians* (AASL) 2011; Cooper et al. 2012; Kucer 2014; Paesani et al. 2016; Reyes-Torres 2018; Warner and Dupuy 2018). As such, the multimodal training approach that we propose for the FL class stems from Kern’s notion of literacy, first, “as a process of creating and transforming knowledge”

(2000, 29), and second, “as a matter of engaging in the ever-developing process of using reading and writing as tools for thinking and learning, in order to expand one’s understanding of oneself and the world” (40). This involves paying attention to language, while also developing a critical awareness of the relationships between texts, images, discourse conventions and sociocultural and digital contexts. In sum, and in consonance with Kern and other scholars such as the NLG (1996), Steve Kucer (2014), Maria Brisk (2015), Paesani et al. (2016) and Shari Tishman (2018), we define literacy as a dynamic and multidimensional concept whose main aim is to provide twenty-first-century learners with the language skills, visual thinking strategies and dialogic attitudes that are necessary to develop the knowledge that allows them to grasp and evaluate information, organize ideas, exchange perspectives, construct meaning and reflect critically on a variety of sociocultural contexts.

In order to foster such a multidimensional approach to literacy in EFL and implement it as an organizing principle (Kress 2010; Serafini 2014), it is necessary that teachers become acquainted with the three dimensions that both Kern (2000) and Kucer (2014) acknowledge as the key components: a) cognitive; b) conceptual; and c) sociocultural. These dimensions constitute a field of forces that complement one another and are equally important in the process of both teaching and learning, and they also illustrate the multiple facets and fluid nature of literacy.

### 2.1. The Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension is based on the learners’ identity, values, attitudes, previous knowledge and natural ability to approach a text and generate new ideas. It is essential, especially in the initial stages, to have students develop some kind of emotional connection to the topic or reading selected. In this way, it is important to understand that it is not the teacher that makes the learning or reading meaningful, but the student and his or her desire to learn (Reyes-Torres and Bird 2015). According to Kern, “reading is a thinking process through which readers must relate the written symbols or *images* they perceive to their knowledge of language, of texts, of content areas, and of the world, in order to bring meaning to a text” (2000, 29; italics added). In Kucer’s terms, readers are meaning makers (2014, 7). Texts do not have just one specific meaning that every student must learn. Instead, readers must construct by themselves their own interpretation. Their main task, therefore, is to create and construct rather than pick up meaning. This can be applied to any type of multimodal text. The focus must be on the mental strategies and the processes used to produce and transform knowledge. As students infer their first ideas from some selected quotes or passages, teaching effectively means exploring their different initial responses, helping them build their ideas, generating their interest in particular themes or topics and, ultimately, helping them experience positive learning emotions. This is especially important in EFL in order to keep students motivated, develop their confidence and guide them to perceive learning as the “self-discovery of knowledge” (Dewaele 2011).

## 2.2. The Conceptual Dimension

The conceptual dimension deals with the knowledge of how various sign systems are employed to construct meaning through multimodal texts (Kucer 2014). It pays attention to the features available: images, color, sound, print as well as the linguistic and artistic features and literary conventions that each reader needs to examine in order to understand any type of discourse. According to Kern, this dimension introduces an element of conscious control as well as a range of vocabulary to allow students to begin a process of meaning design (2000, 133). In Kucer's terms, the reader is a code-breaker whose task is to identify and understand the relationship between the literary devices and the verbal and visual language that writers or artists use as cues to bring meaning to their work. As he points out, "no world of meaning stands alone, and both its content and form will display features found in other texts. The meanings must be linked to existing text types, genres and *particular contexts*. In addition, they must reflect an organizational pattern, such as time order, antecedent/consequent or comparison/contrast, that is acceptable within a particular text type" (2014, 154; italics added).

The objective of the teacher is to carefully select the type of multimodal text, the contents, the concepts and the elements that will be studied, and to introduce them gradually—*scaffolding*—so that students can start the process of learning and can begin to generate and discuss meanings that are both internally coherent—within the text itself—and externally coherent—they fit with and can be compared to other literary or visual texts. Likewise, for the teaching of literacy at early levels, the conceptual dimension could also be adapted to integrate systematic phonics instruction in order to create a balanced reading program. This method incorporates phonemic awareness and phonics—understanding the relationships between sounds and their written representations—guided reading aloud, vocabulary development, fluency and multimodal comprehension. In sum, this brings us to the idea that meaning construction is not only cognitively dependent, but conceptually dependent as well (Kucer 2014, 150). The challenge in this case is to guide students to carry out this process in EFL.

## 2.3. The Sociocultural and Aesthetic Dimension

This dimension shifts the attention from the text to the reader as a subject who is shaped by the cultural context in which he or she dwells. As Paesani et al. (2016) explain, the learner is socially constructed and instilled with particular sociocultural perspectives that become crucial at the time of constructing meaning and interpreting any multimodal resource. Likewise, Louise Rosenblatt points out that "the meaning of any text does not lay in the work itself but in the reader's interaction with it" (1986, 125). In consequence, the sociocultural and aesthetic dimension focuses on the necessary dialogical practices that must be established between the reader and the text, as well as between readers. How the tasks are set up to provide learners with opportunities to engage in meaning making based on their personal outlook is

as important as having them exchange their views and develop a dialogic attitude. In this regard, two important principles established by John Elliott should be emphasized: a) discussion must prevail over instruction as a procedural approach to construct knowledge; and b) “discussion should protect divergence of view among participants rather than attempt to achieve consensus” (2007, 22). Thus, teachers should be receptive and welcome the substantial differences among students as well as the wide variation in their understandings and critical reflections. The goal is not to have all students think the same or reach the same conclusions, but to have them engage in their own process of reflection and construct their own knowledge (Reyes-Torres 2017).

To sum up, for the aesthetic experience to occur, students need to relate to the texts in some way and to share their ideas; an emotional response must appear in order to awaken their feelings and cause an internal reflection—although in some cases the reflection may happen first, order not being set or important. Rosenblatt (1986) and Jeanne Connell (2000) define this experience as the synthesis of what a reader already knows, feels and desires along with what the text offers. On the part of the teacher, the aim must be to facilitate students’ reflections and guide them to experience enjoyment and pleasure in the very act of reading, looking and thinking. In the particular case of working with literary texts, Kimberly A. Nance highlights that “students who wait for teachers to tell them what each work means never experience what makes people so passionate about literature—the moment when they draw a connection for themselves” (2010, 70). This idea could also be applied to other types of texts. The action of achieving a new perspective or a new active, creative and aesthetic awareness requires meaningful engagement between the target text and the reader/learner that leads to their personal and nontransferable experience. This, in turn, triggers the process of knowledge construction and the development of the critical dimension of the individual.

Regarding the particular context of EFL teaching, the idea that language learning is not only a linguistic and cognitive activity but also a lived, participatory social practice within specific cultural contexts, subject to the multiple and changing forces of everyday life, is an accepted principle of current second language acquisition (SLA) studies such as cognitive linguistics, functional linguistics and the Dynamic System Theory (DST). As Kees de Bot et al. point out, what these theories have in common is that “they recognize the crucial role of the interaction of a multitude of variables at different levels: in communication, in constructing meaning, in learning a language and among the languages in the multilingual mind” (2007, 7). This view is in fact regarded as an ecological approach that acknowledges that language learning, in this case EFL, and the development of knowledge can be seen as an emergent, dynamic, open-ended and intersubjectively negotiated process. DST refers to it as a “complete interconnectedness” (De Bot et al. 2007, 7) in which many factors such as motivation, aptitude, degree of input and L1 are all interrelated and have an effect on the FL learning process.



### 3. THE MULTILITERACIES PEDAGOGY APPROACH

The NLG proposal aims to adapt literacy to the social reality of the classroom through what they have called a *pedagogy of multiliteracies* (1996). This pedagogy emphasizes the fact that there cannot be one particular set of standards or skills that constitute the goals of literacy learning (64). It therefore focuses on various modes of representation, much broader than language alone, that integrate rather than separate the study of literary, visual and sociocultural contents. Likewise, this pedagogical approach conceives learning as an active process of meaning making and not something governed by static rules (74). As the backbone of the multiliteracies framework, it incorporates the concept of *meaning design*, which involves three elements: “Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned” (74). From this perspective, individuals construct meaning based on the Available Designs, that is, the resources that a text comprises, stressing the interdependence of language—verbal and visual—with semiotic and literary-cultural contents. Learners are thus enabled to identify particular elements, reflect on texts and create meaning. The actual process of meaning making is called Design(ing) and the resulting new meaning that learners construct is considered The Redesigned. Our aim in this article is to provide EFL teachers with effective instruction based on this type of pedagogy by integrating the *knowledge processes framework* (NLG 1996) with a selected range of visual thinking strategies to transform learners into active, creative, critical users of multimodal texts.

To this end, as we have already stated, picturebooks are a highly effective pedagogical resource. Their combination of words and images, as a wide list of authors concur, constitutes a multimodal reading experience that offers readers not only a verbal and aesthetic context but also an organized path that results in a line of coherence and a sense of unity (Bader 1976; S. Marantz 1992; Lewis 2001; Goldstone 2002; Nikolajeva and Scott 2006; Serafini 2014; Arizpe and Styles 2015; Nodelman 2018). Perry Nodelman remarks that picturebooks are unlike any other form of verbal and visual art due to their tactile features and their pleasurable character as fictional artifacts that can be touched, read several times and shared with friends, family, etc. (2018, 9). Moreover, because the verbal texts in picturebooks are as necessary a part of them as the visual images, they represent an ideal resource to engage children in a multimodal and meaningful way. Following this line of argument, Kenneth Marantz defines picturebooks as “visual-verbal entities to be experienced” (1977, 150), Barbara Bader agrees that as an art form, their possibilities are limitless (1976, 1), and Bette P. Goldstone emphasizes the active role of the reader in enriching and supporting the storyline by infusing personal emotions and experiences (2002, 366).

Throughout this article, we will explore the picturebook *The Snow Lion* (2017), by Jim Helmore and Richard Jones, to illustrate how to implement the four knowledge processes of the multiliteracies pedagogy approach proposed by NLG (1996)—experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying. This knowledge processes framework serves as a guide to help teachers develop young students’ literacy, but does not constitute a linear hierarchy or sequence. In fact, elements of each of these pedagogical acts may occur at any time during the learning process (NLG 1996, 85).

As Mary Kalantzis et al. (2016) and Mandy R. Menke and Paesani (2019) highlight, it is important to reflect on how to combine these four processes and when to apply them depending on one's own purposes. In brief, we can describe them as follows:

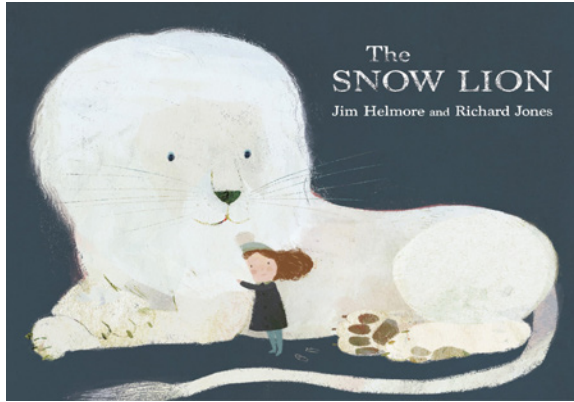
- Experiencing engages learners in meaningful lessons that incorporate both spontaneous reflection and lived experiences. This allows them to immerse themselves in the text.
- Conceptualizing draws students' attention towards specific concepts and explicit instruction on how form—linguistic, visual, spatial layout, etc.—produces meaning. The goal is to prepare learners for competent participation. What should they know and understand? What specific knowledge do they need so teachers can guide their process of inquiry and meaning making?
- Analyzing aims to reflect on the author's writing, discuss any given message from another perspective and how it might relate to particular social contexts and/or ideologies.
- Finally, applying consists in activities that allow learners to elaborate their own interpretations based on what they have learned. In essence, it is the transfer of new knowledge to other situations and the production of new designs.

On the whole, the main goal is to guide children to access texts cognitively and aesthetically (Bataller and Reyes-Torres 2019). Due to the rapid changes unfolding constantly in the modern multimedia universe, it is especially important that students be trained to develop their literacy in order to make sense of all the information they receive. Consuming multiple impacts of sensory and perceptual information is different from deep learning and developing thinking skills. In this respect, storytelling and picturebooks such as *The Snow Lion* constitute a key pedagogical resource for teachers to brainstorm how to create a path through which students can creatively explore, inquire and organize information to think critically in the FL (Nikolajeva and Scott 2000). As we have already mentioned, the tasks and the level must be in accordance with the class needs. In this case, the activities that we have designed are addressed to students working towards reaching an A2 level in fifth year of primary education.

#### 4. *THE SNOW LION* AND THE FOUR PEDAGOGICAL ACTS OF THE MULTILITERACIES FRAMEWORK

*The Snow Lion* is about the experience of a little girl called Caro, who moves to a new house at the top of a hill with her mother. Jones's illustrations, which have a subjective and poetic style, are key to understanding the mood and feelings of the child at every moment. Loneliness, fantasy and friendship are the thematic axes of this story, in which text and illustrations work together seamlessly.

FIGURE 1. Illustrations by Richard Jones from *The Snow Lion*.  
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 © Richard Jones 2017



As we can see in figure 1, the cover art—as well as the endpapers—immediately draw readers into an enormous cuddly white lion, Caro’s special friend, who gently helps her through a new experience when she feels a little lost and small. As the story progresses, the snow lion leads Caro to find her own internal courage and to realize that she can make new friends on her own.

#### 4.1. Experiencing

As Susanne Reichl points out, “the potential meaning that is inherent in literature does not have to be seen as something very intellectual or only accessible for very advanced learners” (2012, 132). Picturebooks like *The Snow Lion* make it easy for children to be drawn into the story and naturally connect with the main character and her feelings. However, in order to establish a reader-book educational link and guide young readers towards developing their thoughts more profoundly, it is also essential to engage them cognitively. We can do this in two ways: a) by fostering an open conversation to initiate a process of inquiry and reflection through which they can use previous knowledge and experiences (MacKenzie and Bathurst-Hunt 2018); and b) by directing their attention towards the fictional narration in the book in a multimodal way, taking notice of both the written story and the visual narration. Tishman refers to this process as *slow looking*, which consists in the implementation of exploratory observation and descriptive strategies (2018, 8). Similarly, Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine have developed a teaching approach called Visual Thinking Strategies that focuses on accommodating the strengths and needs of learners at different aesthetic stages (2014). In both cases, it is essential to create a learning context in which students are willing to participate, look carefully, develop opinions, express themselves and consider multiple

viewpoints. With *The Snow Lion*, we can start by exploring the cover and introducing vocabulary words and basic elements of art and visual thinking (Arnheim 1969): girl, lion, white, big, small, size, soft, dark, friends, colors, shapes. Also, we can ask questions such as: What can you see on the cover? What does the picture of the two characters make you think about? What are they doing? What do you think the story is going to be about?

As a rule, the initial questions within the experiencing process integrate the conventional prereading stage and allow teachers to reach a closer understanding of students' perspectives and sociocultural background. It is essential to guide the child's gaze so that he or she begins to associate ideas with what they imagine is happening, and thus prompt them to elaborate on their own individual, critical and differentiated discourse. The teacher can then take advantage of these associations to direct the conversation towards personal matters relevant to the students. The objective is to build a bridge on demand between the story they are reading in the picturebook and the child's life experiences: Do you like lions? Have you ever seen a white lion? What does this white lion in the picture make you feel? Do you feel alone sometimes? Where do you live? Do you live in a town or in a city? Do you like your home? How many friends do you have? Children's responses will allow us to learn about their lives and to later address more abstract topics such as friendship, solitude, home, imagination and so on.

In brief, experiencing is in line with the cognitive dimension of literacy that we discussed before. It is indispensable in order to help students connect with the learning process, and teachers should try to take advantage of it at any point in the lesson. The multimodal challenge entails combining several channels—verbal and nonverbal language—to foster the child's construction of versatile scaffolding necessary for the development of their own cognitive learning, both of visual/plastic literacy and of EFL. This provides students with a meaningful pedagogical experience (Cummins and Early 2015) that in addition leads them along the path towards, first, the interpretation of other semiotic signs used in the digital world, and second, aesthetic encounters and aesthetic development.

#### 4.2. Conceptualizing

When designing a lesson that is focused on fostering students' ability to think and to work with multimodal texts in EFL, we need to begin by selecting and building those blocks of literacy that we consider necessary to provide learners with the basic knowledge needed to approach an image, a sentence or a story. What concepts should learners come to identify and understand in order to elaborate new meanings and develop their knowledge? As Barbara K. Kiefer points out, "both the author and artist have elements that convey meaning. The author uses sound and words, the phonetic and morphemic system. The artist uses line, shape, color, value, and texture, the elements of art" (1995, 117). When working with picturebooks, the language produces a linear sequence of meaning—a story—that may engage the intellect in more precise thoughts and ideas, but in many cases, that particular meaning may not be totally understood

by EFL learners because it may include words they have not yet learned. Visual art, in contrast, is more readily understood across cultures and places, and it may more easily evoke emotions (Kiefer 1995). In both cases, one important aspect to teach is the use of metalanguage. As the NLG explains, “the goal is conscious awareness and control over what is being learned” (1996, 86) in order to recognize and categorize a series of concepts, conventions and semiotic signs that facilitate the interpretation and the exchange of ideas (Sipe 2008; Kalantzis et al. 2016; Menke and Paesani 2019).

Based on Kiefer’s research (1995), and considering picturebooks a “unique visual and literary art form” (Driggs and Sipe 2007, 273) where images and words work together synergistically, in tables 1 and 2 we present a multimodal multiliteracy toolkit that consists of those elements of literature and visual features that teachers may find useful in order to read and decode any picturebook. It is intended to guide preservice teachers in the analysis and interpretation of picturebooks and to help them achieve the following two goals: a) acquire a basic knowledge of literary and visual conventions to be used in the EFL classroom, and b) observe, identify and understand a series of concepts that are essential for working with young learners in order to explore and analyze a verbal or visual text.

TABLE 1. Multimodal multiliteracy toolkit: elements of literature

<b>Story and plot</b>
The story is the idea, the general theme and the loose interpretation of the event in its entirety. The plot is what happens, the sequence of events. What is the setting? What is the conflict? What is the turning point or climax that determines the ending? How does the story turn out (resolution)? How are the images integrated in the plot?
<b>Tone</b>
It refers to the implied attitude towards the subject of the story. Is it hopeful, pessimistic, dreary, worried? An author conveys tone to create a precise impression on the reader.
<b>Character</b>
Who is/are the protagonist/s? Are there any antagonists? How are they characterized?
<b>Language style</b>
What is the style of the picturebook (formal vs. informal)? How are the adjectives used? How are the verbs and what are the states or actions they describe? How is the vocabulary (colloquial, technical, etc.)?
<b>Figurative language</b>
The use of words to express meaning beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Symbols: Can you identify any symbols that are used in the story? What do you think they are used for?</li> <li>- Metaphor: connecting two seemingly unlike things to enhance the meaning of a situation or theme without using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i></li> <li>- Simile: connecting two seemingly unlike things to enhance the meaning of a situation or theme using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i></li> <li>- Hyperbole: exaggeration</li> <li>- Personification: giving animals or nonhuman objects human characteristics</li> </ul>

TABLE 2. Multimodal multiliteracy toolkit: visual features

A. Elements
Color
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Color wheel (primary / secondary / complementary)</li> <li>- Color symbolism</li> <li>- Color families / palette / schema</li> <li>- Neutral colors</li> <li>- Pastel colors</li> <li>- Bright / dark colors</li> </ul>
Shape
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geometric / organic (natural) / abstract</li> <li>- Open / close</li> <li>- Positive / negative</li> </ul>
Line
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Straight / sharp / organic</li> <li>- Thin / thick</li> <li>- Literal contour (visible / solid) / implied (suggested / dashed)</li> <li>- Vertical / horizontal / diagonal / gesture</li> </ul>
Texture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Graphisms / patterns of lines and decorations</li> <li>- Surfaces / motifs and ornaments</li> </ul>
B. Principles (global rules of perception and composition)
Composition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focal point (emphasis)</li> <li>- Perspective (flat / 3D)</li> <li>- Size (big / medium / small)</li> <li>- Movement and rhythm (static composition / dynamic composition)</li> <li>- Contrast (dark / bright)</li> <li>- Balance (harmony)</li> <li>- Unity / fragmentation</li> </ul>

Another significant aspect to bear in mind is that due to their polysemous value, the visual features, unlike the textual ones, do not follow clearly defined fixed conventions. On the contrary, depending on the author consulted, we can find a variety of interesting working systems for the study, analysis and teaching of the components of visual messages. As Donis A. Dondis puts it, “of all means of human communication, the visual alone has no regimen, no methodology, no single system with prescribed guidelines for either expression or understanding of visual methods” (1973, 11). Thus, although there is not a unique taxonomy of the basic units of visual communication and we must accept that there is a part that is left to intuition, this uncertainty and complexity should not be seen as a problem, but as a rich challenge or adventure (182).

Nevertheless, since each picturebook is unique and cannot be considered an objective entity, it must not be forgotten that all these terms and concepts are not givens for the reader. The teacher always needs to adapt to specific readings taking into account the essential aesthetic nature of picturebooks so as to foster, not only the knowledge of formal properties, but also to ignite the students’ intellectual understanding as well as their emotional engagement with the book. As Kiefer states, “line, shape, color, texture, and value are generally accepted as the basic elements with which the illustrator works. Principles of organization, or the ways in which the artist brings these elements together, can include compositional precepts such as eye movement, balance, rhythm and pattern” (1995, 121).

David Lewis calls the experience of active reading *interanimation*, a process by which “the images provide the words with a specificity—color, shape and form—that they would otherwise lack” (2001, 35). In the words of Carol Driggs and Lawrence R. Sipe, the verbal text draws the reader’s attention to particular parts of the illustration (2007, 274). Thus, we are talking about a process of active meaning making with images and texts. Picturebooks offer an active experience of creating new routes of active reading by blending and connecting words and images, and position the student as accomplice of the whole process. That is what Driggs and Sipe call the process of *co-authorship* and *co-artistry* (2007, 279). In the middle of the playing field that every story offers, readers/viewers explore and experiment a multimodal multiliteracy game that includes new forms of representation and inquiry that will develop their capacity for critical thinking and learning. As such, what is particularly important in our current twenty-first-century multimodal world is that, as we have already highlighted, teachers are prepared to guide students in the reading and thinking process. Unless teachers know how to interpret the available designs that the story displays, they will not be able to help learners to identify the verbal and visual signs, establish connections and construct meaning.

At this point, once teachers have read *The Snow Lion* several times on their own and have a personal understanding of it, it is the moment to plan the key concepts they want to highlight in order to lead learners to recognize them and produce

meaning. We can start by commenting on how *The Snow Lion* opens with a dark, nighttime double-page spread that frames the action spatially and temporally (figure 2). This is the setting of the plot. Caro and her mom are driving up a hill toward their new house.

FIGURE 2. Illustrations by Richard Jones from *The Snow Lion*.  
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The image illustrates the words of the narrator—a change of home—and conveys Caro’s emotions. It is worth noting the visual contrast between the predominantly dark tones and the full moon that appears just to the right of the new house. Symbolically, the lights of the car point forward in that direction.

On the next page, Caro walks into the house for the first time: “The walls were white, the ceilings were white, and even the doors were white” (Helmore and Jones 2017). Here we can observe again the magnificent job that the author and the illustrator do working with multimodality: words and images—the white color, the lack of furniture, the open spaces and the suitcases—convey the conflict of the story. Caro needs to adapt to her new home and circumstances, but she feels scared, insecure and alone. As a young girl, she expresses her wish to have “someone to play with” (Helmore and Jones 2017). Then one day, as shown in figure 3, she hears a gentle voice and, magically, a friendly white lion materializes from the wall and suggests a game of hide-and-seek. That moment changes everything.



FIGURE 3. Illustrations by Richard Jones from *The Snow Lion*.  
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From then on, the narrative flow and the story constitute key elements in turning this multimodal reading into an experience that facilitates the process of meaning making. On the one hand, the written text describes how Caro's friendship with the imaginary snow lion leads her to build up her confidence. As they continue to play hide-and-seek, thanks to her new friend's support, Caro's initial fears and loneliness turn to self-assurance and courage to go outside and meet other children. At the same time, the progressive inclusion of color in the following pages reveals Caro's transition between the inside and outside world and her gradual development. In this regard, as we can see in figure 4, the window of the house constitutes the symbolic border between the two areas. Graphically there is no limit defined by a line, but there is a clear contrast between the white walls inside and the colorful red, green and yellow kites outside.

FIGURE 4. Illustrations by Richard Jones from *The Snow Lion*.  
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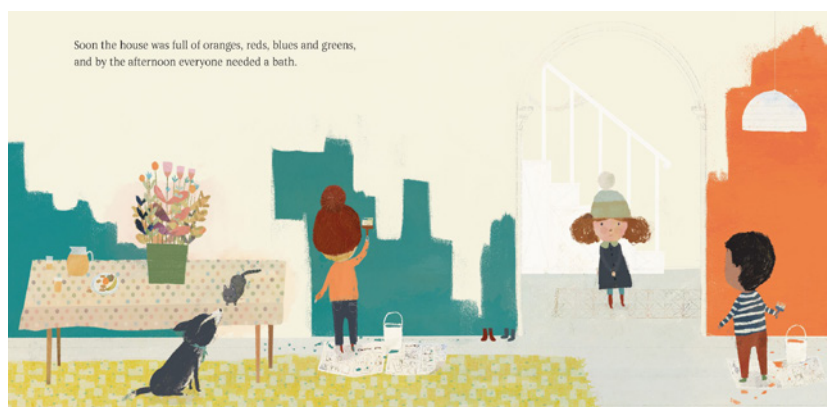
It is thus through the window that Caro catches her first glimpse of the colourful reality outside. Likewise, her adaptation also becomes more explicit over the following pages through lines such as “So Caro went to the park,” “Caro went to Bobby’s house” and “‘Give it a try,’ said the lion” (Helmore and Jones 2017).

Finally, one morning Caro’s mom makes a decision—“I think it’s time we put some colour into this house, don’t you?” (Helmore and Jones 2017)—and she invites “all Caro’s new friends for a painting party” (Helmore and Jones 2017). Although the young girl is still hesitant and claims that she likes it white, “soon the house was full of oranges, reds, blues and greens” (Helmore and Jones 2017), as we can see in figure 5.

FIGURE 5. Illustrations by Richard Jones from *The Snow Lion*.

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But Caro is not happy. Everyone seems to enjoy the fun of painting the walls except for her, afraid as she is of losing her dearest friend, the snow lion. Will he disappear? Will she still be able to see him? This is the climax of the story, as Caro has to overcome her fears and face a series of questions: Is she prepared to follow her path alone? Does growing up imply losing support from friends? If the walls are no longer white, what is going to happen to the snow lion? Will he find new friends to comfort? As the story continues, we find an answer to all these questions. Most importantly, Caro realizes that she will always be able to find the snow lion whenever she needs to. That is the resolution of the story.

Furthermore, the multimodal narration throughout these pages not only constitutes a central aspect to understand the climax—it is depicted through images and not through words—but also allows students to conceptualize other elements of literature and visual features included in the toolkit. We can observe that the

story is written in a simple and straightforward language style with uncomplicated sentences that flow easily alongside the pictures. It presents a tone of hope and Caro is characterized as a dynamic character whose development, as we have seen, is portrayed along with the incorporation of the visual features. Here it is important for teachers to guide learners' attention to the different visual elements. Regarding the colors, the soft white palette that defines the snow lion is combined with the vivid colors of the outside world; the shapes are mostly concrete structures but the snow lion often appears as a blurred figure that merges with the wall; the texture is cotton-like.

As for the principles that represent the global rules of perception and composition that the illustrator applies, the focal point reconfirms the emphasis on the girl and the lion as the two main characters. Despite their difference in size, it is possible to perceive a sense of harmony throughout the book and the gentle progression of the integration of the interior and the exterior spaces.

Lastly, regarding the linguistic aspects, *The Snow Lion* contains everyday language that is traditionally included in most primary education syllabuses. It introduces learners to the grammatical structures of English in a natural way. For instance, rather than using one tense at a time, the narrative includes several, which is what happens in real life, and while the story is told in the past simple, we can also find verbs in the present tense, the present perfect, the future, etc. The following extract is a good example:

Then, one day, the lion looked thoughtful.

"Have you tried the slide in the park?" he asked.

"I like playing here with you," said Caro.

"I'll still be here when you get back," the lion replied. (Helmore and Jones 2017)

Here, after guiding students to interpret and discuss the conversation, teachers can work with them to create other dialogues in which they can practice different verb tenses. In addition, the story includes a wide range of vocabulary related to colors as well as specific words related to children's play, such as hide-and-seek, building a pirate spaceship, burying treasures, racing, chasing or climbing, that are fun to learn and easy to understand because of students' familiarity with the context; the illustrations also help to convey their meanings. Similarly, we also find the use of comparisons and superlative adjectives such as "as white as snow" or "all lions are happiest outdoors" that can serve as models to focus on these forms and phrases.

On the whole, the interpretation of the images incorporates an emotional element that engages readers in the plot while they attempt to understand the linguistic meaning of the words and become acquainted with other artistic concepts. Together, they constitute a parallel but integrated narrative that makes reading and learning EFL more global and enriching.

### 4.3. Analyzing

The third knowledge process of the multiliteracies framework aims to relate textual and visual meaning with social, cultural, historical or ideological contexts and purposes (Menke and Paesani 2019). The main goal is to have students interpret the reading from different points of view and learn to understand a particular voice, its position, motivation and concerns (Reichl 2012, 131). To do so, teachers may want to encourage learners to discuss the authors' perspective, their choice of specific characters, words, colors or events, the effects of these choices, whether or not the story carries out any implicit or explicit messages, what type of emotions it triggers, and lastly, the relevance of the different themes that *The Snow Lion* raises.

We could start by asking students to think about the themes portrayed and make a list of questions related to each of them to open the discussion. The following list could serve as a guide:

- Theme 1: A new house. Questions we could use: Why do you think Caro and her mom moved to a new house? Have you ever had a similar experience? What difficulties do you think a child would have if they moved to an area where they did not know anyone?
- Theme 2: Loneliness. Questions we could use: Can we describe what it means to feel lonely? Do you think the white walls inside the house represent Caro's loneliness at the beginning of the story? Can you explain how the color white is connected to Caro's feelings when she enters the house for the first time? Loneliness is a feeling that both children and adults are likely to experience at some point in life: What might be the reason for that? Is this something that happens equally in every society, in every town or in every city?
- Theme 3: Growing up. *The Snow Lion* shows Caro's development throughout the story. Questions we could use: Do you think that playing with the snow lion and meeting Bobby contribute to Caro's growth? Can you indicate other significant changes in Caro? Do you think that friends have an influence in our lives? What is the meaning of having a painting party at home and having Caro's new group of friends paint the walls of her new house?
- Theme 4: Friendship and fantasy. Having an imaginary friend is common in childhood. The imaginary friend is often a personified object such as a stuffed animal that can talk and play with a child, or sometimes it is an invisible friend like the snow lion. Questions we could use: How is this type of interpersonal relationship represented in this story? How does the game of hide-and-seek fit nicely with the idea of having an imaginary friend? To what extent does Caro's imagination reveal her struggle to adapt to her new circumstances? Why do you think the author chose a big white lion as Caro's imaginary friend? What are some of the characteristics that define a good friend?

- Theme 5: Inside-Outside. From the very beginning of the story, we can see the contrast between two worlds: the inside of the house and the outdoor spaces, imagination and reality. Questions we could use: How is this contrast depicted through the choice of colors? How do the two worlds merge in the end? How many different *worlds* do we inhabit?

Picturebooks are particularly good at demonstrating the active role the reader has in the meaning-making process. While the process of analyzing requires a certain command of the FL, students who have an A2 level or are almost there could definitely participate, because the multimodal reading experience allows them to explore and negotiate the meaning of the story by paying attention to both the visual elements and the literary narration. What they see and read, along with the class discussion, provides them not only with the opportunity to practice the language and develop their own personal interpretation, but also with an aesthetic experience.

#### 4.4. Applying

According to Cope and Kalantzis, “knowledge is not (just) the stuff that ends up in our minds. It is what we do and make. Learning is a consequence of a series of knowledge actions” (2015, 32). Applying is thus a knowledge process in which learners transfer understandings and meanings they have developed through previous knowledge processes. Teachers therefore need to develop ways in which students can carry out new practices in new contexts. While, logically, the different activities will vary depending on the age of the student group, all of them should be designed to support students in becoming knowledge producers and, in this particular case, to demonstrate what they have learned as a result of the reading of *The Snow Lion* and their subsequent reflection on this. In this line of thought, below there is an example of four activities that center around the topic *change as a part of life* and that, as we have already mentioned, are intended for fifth-year primary students to encourage them to present their ideas through a range of different modes:

- Activity 1: Feelings and emotions. Students receive a blank sheet of paper, a box of crayons, a black marker and three photographs that convey a series of feelings through images that show different colors and people. The goal is to have children think and create a collage that represents the changes in feelings and emotions that they experience within one day. They must also add a few words to give it a title. Once they have finished, they present their work to their classmates and reflect together on other changes they are likely to experience in a month or even a year.
- Activity 2: City of colors. Teachers give students the silhouette of a house on a piece of A5 paper. During the first part of the activity, students work

individually. They must imagine that it is their house, choose a color to paint it and explain what the color symbolizes for them. Once they have done that, they work collaboratively to design a mural with all the houses. As they finish, they can reflect on the city of colors that they have created and compare it with the city or town where they live. In what ways does each family and culture contribute to making a city more diverse? To what extent do human actions have an impact on our surroundings? Have they noticed any big or important changes in their neighborhoods recently?

- Activity 3: Musical timeline. Students videotape an interview with a family member about three important life changes. Afterwards, they create a timeline and choose a different song for each of the significant moments. They need to comment on the song (lyrics, type of music, video clip, etc.) and on any reactions that it may provoke in them.
- Activity 4: What changes as you grow up? Growing up implies facing frequent identity changes as you go through life. Ask students to write and illustrate a story, of four pages maximum, in which they are the main character. They must bring a picture of themselves to put on the cover and then imagine four key moments in their future when they are a particular age. They should illustrate each of those moments or situations with a collage of pictures where they also include an annotative text in which, since they are imagining the future, they are allowed to use the present tense.

As students recount the fictional narrative of their own future lives, they develop their imagination and begin to build their agency as active readers/viewers. This is indeed a fundamental stage in the process of becoming multiliterate. By constructing meaning using available cognitive, conceptual and sociocultural resources, students are actively engaged in generating and applying knowledge in EFL.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this article, *The Snow Lion* constitutes a multimodal resource that contributes both to the personal and social training of students of the twenty-first century and to the development of their ability to reflect, understand reality and express their ideas. Based on the four processes of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Kalantzis et al. 2016) and the combination of linguistic, literary and visual features, we have presented a methodology that draws on traditional notions of storytelling but adapts them to the multimodal focus that today's society demands preservice teachers to be equipped with. In this respect, picturebooks prove to be an effective multimodal artifact in helping students develop the three dimensions of literacy—cognitive, conceptual and sociocultural—in the FL and create a natural bond with creativity, stories and literature (Bader 1976). As Michael Byram and Manuela Wagner argue,

“by teaching languages through a more holistic approach, and through content that is relevant to the students’ lives and to society, we make sure that we foster critical thinking skills while also teaching important knowledge about the world” (2017, 149). The new challenge for new teachers is learning to design and implement their own multimodal and multiliteracies-oriented lessons. This means that the knowledge processes framework is more crucial than ever before, since novice instructors must prioritize the creation of a new learning path that can provide students with a sense of order and an experience that is clearly differentiated from the continuous state of superficial partial attention that has taken root in today’s digitized society.

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