

Conference Report

Learning English Through Picture Books

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I had a unique opportunity to participate in the Conference organised by the IATEFL YL SIG, the British Council Germany and Internationale Jugendbibliothek Munich, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Realbook news and Mopsy Club.

There were 150 participants from 20 countries. The conference provided space for both theoretical and practical experience. It was started by a plenary session given by Janet Enever (London Metropolitan University) and Opal Dunn (Realbooks news). They both provided a very clear theoretical framework for the following programme as they gave the rationale for using real books for TEYLs.

On Saturday the participants were divided into four groups in which four researchers presented their findings. I was one of the presenters and I was in the group where a colleague from Latvia presented a project called „Travelling Books“ in which schools from 4 countries gathered in sharing various books through lesson plans that teachers prepared.

The second presentation was given by Jutta Rymarczyk (Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg) and she looked at cross-curricular links in using real books, especially books with various forms of art. Throughout the conference the visual literacy was mentioned alongside the language one.

I presented my small-scale research on „What teachers find challenging in introducing picture books in their English lessons“. My presentation was based on data gathered from 74 teachers of English.

The last presentation in our group was given by Penelope Robinson (School of Education, University of Leeds) and she discussed the practice of shared reading using Big Books to promote first and second language development.

After that a practical workshop on using real books followed, real books means authentic books that are published for English speaking children. We had an inspiring session with Sandie Mourao (IATEFL YL SIG coordinator based in Portugal). Her session called „EEK! A cheese and tomato spider!“ used Nick Sharrat flap book and provided ideas how to use it with pre-school children.

After lunch there were two sessions given by the prominent authors and illustrators of children's books. I took part in Pat Hutchins' and Tony Ross's sessions. They gave the conference a new dimension which made it so unique and different from other ELT events.

On Sunday there was a slot where teachers exchanged their ideas on using picture books with their learners. Then a panel discussion followed in which experts from various countries answered the questions raised by the participants.

The final talk was given by Professor Dr Friederike Klippel from the Munich University. She talked about Literacy through Picture books.

The whole conference was a great success because of its academic programme, the venue (The Internationale Jugendbibliothek which is located in Schloss Blutenburg) and its participants, the enthusiastic teachers from all over the world.