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## USING STORIES IN THEME – BASED INSTRUCTION

*Abstract:* The paper looks at the ways of integrating stories into thematic units for teaching English to young learners. First, it gives rationale both for theme-based instruction and for using stories in teaching English to young learners: thematic units connect language teaching to cross-curricula themes and provide real-life communication situations and opportunities to use language in a new, creative and fun way; stories are a natural context for language development and ‘powerful strategies for structuring learning’ in a thematic unit. The paper then explores the potential of authentic stories for providing ‘acquisition rich environment’ in teaching English to young learners, in general, and in teaching the subject content, in particular. The possibilities of integrating the authentic story *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child (2000) into Grade 2 English curriculum in Serbian primary school is studied by building the thematic unit *Vegetables* based on the story, and focusing on determining objectives, selecting the right activities and designing appropriate materials. Finally, the paper concludes that both thematic units and authentic stories can be used as vehicles to increase children’s engagement in the language classroom and to develop their language proficiency and general and content knowledge.

*Key words:* theme-based instruction, authentic story, young learners, meaningful context, subject content, fluency development

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The trend of lowering the age of starting foreign language instruction, that began at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has now spread to almost all parts of the world. The age at which students start learning a foreign language has shifted from 11–12 to 6–9 or even younger. This process affected teaching and learning English as a second or a foreign language as most non-English speaking coun-

tries in the world now opt for English as a first foreign or a second language in the primary curriculum. Serbia is no exception and in 2003 Serbian Ministry of Education and Science introduced English as a compulsory subject in the primary curriculum from grade one (students aged 6–7). English is now taught in about 90% of Serbian state primary schools.

However, starting a foreign language instruction early does not necessarily mean that success is guaranteed. In order to be effective, teaching English to young learners needs to satisfy certain conditions. Drawing on Krashen's language acquisition theory (Krashen et al. 1982), Curtain and Dahlberg (2010: 3) argue that language is acquired most effectively „when the input is meaningful and interesting to the learner, when it is comprehensible (i+1), and when it is not grammatically sequenced“. The authors (ibid. 5) claim that language acquisition happens when children focus on meaning, not on grammar; when a meaningful context is provided, especially through thematic units that incorporate the content of the curricular subjects; when teachers provide a comprehensible input through a lot of visual cues; when children involve several senses in the process of acquiring language; when the learning environment is anxiety-free; when learning experiences are enjoyable and fun; when the topics of instruction are relevant and appropriate to children's age and language level; and when language activities provide opportunities for meaningful communication.

If properly planned and carried out, thematic instruction can easily satisfy all above criteria. Thematic units connect language teaching to cross-curricula themes and provide real-life communication situations and opportunities to use language in a new, creative and fun way. Moreover, thematic instruction creates a natural setting for using stories as powerful strategies and components of thematic units (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010: 151). Carefully selected stories can help introduce content from a number of primary subjects into language instruction. Integration of stories into thematic units introduces a natural context for language development and “an acquisition rich environment” (Brewster et al. 2004: 202)

## 2. THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION AND YOUNG LEARNERS (YL)

Integrated language and content instruction has been a widespread trend in teaching English in the last three decades. Its potential has been stressed in a number of studies (Bentley 2010; Coyle 2007; Coyle et al. 2010; Genesee 2001; Ioannou-Georgiou 2012; Marsh 2002). The approach appears in different models, like content-based language instruction, sheltered subject-matter teaching, theme-based instruction, sheltered instruction, language across the curriculum,

adjunct model, cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), bilingual immersion programmes, etc. These models can be applied at different levels and have proved to be very efficient in both linguistic and academic development of students.

Generally speaking, thematic instruction „offers a means by which English as a second language (ESL) students can continue their academic or cognitive development while they are also acquiring academic language proficiency [...] [and] a means by which foreign language students can develop fuller proficiency in the foreign language they are studying“ (Crandall 1994). In a young learner classroom, integrated instruction can be delivered as theme-based language teaching in which „the thematic content stretches over several weeks of instruction, providing rich input for lessons that are either language-based (i.e. with a focus on vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar) or skills-based (i.e. with a focus on listening, speaking, writing or reading)“ (Shin 2007: 2, drawing on Brinton 2003). In this way children are prepared to use the language for different purposes beyond the classroom (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010: 151).

The main potential of thematic instruction in teaching young learners lies in motivating children through creating contexts that bring English alive, involve them in real meaningful language, actively engage children in purposeful communication, encourage their deeper linguistic and academic development and foster the use of integrated skills. “Foreign language instruction for children can be enriched when teachers use thematic units that focus on content-area information, engage students in activities in which they must think critically, and provide opportunities for students to use the target language in meaningful contexts and in new and complex ways” (Haas 2000). Obviously, theme-based instruction focuses on contents that can inspire meaningful discussion and genuine exchange of information. Thematic units involve a series of four to five lessons connected by a common topic or theme that provides conditions for communicative language learning (Shin 2007: 2).

By integrating subject content into language teaching, language teachers prepare the ground for their students to actively participate in activities where their content knowledge develops simultaneously with their language proficiency, and where meaning is of primary importance. For example, when young learners are learning about different habitats through a foreign language as a medium, their interest is in the content and exchange of information (what the habitat looks like, what animals and plants live in it, what food chains are created, etc.) rather than in language structures. This makes communication more natural, uninhibited and relaxed, and enhances students’ motivation to do tasks and activities by using a foreign language.

Another valuable component of effective teaching is found to be narrative structure and a curriculum based on story form (Curtain and Dahlberd 2010:

158, drawing on Egan 1986). When applied to language curriculum it asks for placing meaning in the centre of language teaching and for supporting it with qualities of a good story, or using an appropriate story in designing a thematic unit. The emotional component of a story makes experiences more memorable (*ibid.*) and contributes to content and language development. It is the importance of stressing meaning in teaching English to young learners that connects thematic units and stories, opening possibilities for language acquisition and development of communication abilities of children.

What kind of stories lend themselves best to theme-based instruction? Are authentic stories appropriate for a young learner EFL classroom? How can stories be incorporated into theme-based language teaching? These questions should be answered in detail before suggestions of classroom activities are offered.

### 3. STORIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS (TEYL)

Children love listening to stories in their mother tongue and the primary curriculum rightly stresses the educational value of stories: they are seen as the most effective way of developing children's critical thinking and affective learning. „Stories make learning easier because the brain is naturally structured to use narrative to organize memory.“ (*ibid.*) In teaching English to young learners stories have been recognized as a powerful tool because they bring many benefits to children's language learning (Brewster et al. 2004; Cameron 2008; Curtain and Daghilberg 2010; Wright 2009). First, stories satisfy the requirements of acquisition-based methodology by helping children pick up words and phrases, and by fostering understanding through pictures, predictable events and language, repetitive story frame, and built-in repetition of words and phrases (Cameron 2008: 163–169). Next, listening to stories prepares children for real-life communication in a foreign language, which will involve a flow of speech, new and unknown words, and will require children to guess and predict meaning and develop a positive attitude to not understanding everything (Wright 2009: 9). Development of listening fluency requires a lot of practice and stories are ideal for achieving it.

Brewster et al. (2004: 186–188) argue that the main benefits of using stories in teaching English to young learners are as follows:

- stories can help develop positive attitudes to language learning because they are motivating, challenging and fun;
- stories encourage creativity through identification with the characters and interpretation of the narrative;

- stories develop imagination and help children understand life and reality;
- stories promote social and emotional development through storytelling as a social experience;
- stories cater to different learning styles and strategies;
- stories expose children to rich language and offer opportunities for introducing and revising vocabulary, structures, and functions;
- stories link English to cross-curricular themes.

In short, stories offer an important source of language experience for children (Wright 2009: 3). If applied properly, stories can considerably contribute to successful language learning owing to memorable contexts and interesting and enjoyable content. Furthermore, they expose children to other cultures and can prepare them for reading authentic literature (Linse 2007: 46, 48). Linked to subject content and cross-curricular themes, stories create conditions for more holistic language learning (Cameron 2008: 159).

#### 4. AUTHENTIC STORIES IN THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION

Authentic stories or real books are the storybooks that are originally not written for language learning. They became popular in teaching English as a foreign language in the 1990's and have since been used as a rich language input and a source of motivation created by a big sense of achievement a child experiences when reading them (Cameron 2008: 188).

Many authentic stories can easily be connected to the themes covered by subject content and used in theme-based language instruction. Ellis and Brewster (2002: 2) suggest using authentic stories to teach Maths (e.g. numbers, counting, addition, subtraction, time, measuring), Science (animals, food chains, insects), Art and Craft (drawing, making puppets, making masks), Environment (conservation), Music (singing songs, playing musical instruments), Physical education (moving like an animal), or Technology (making a book or a box). By linking a story to other subjects in the curriculum, language teachers help children to develop their understanding of the world around them, to upgrade their critical thinking skills, and to experience a story as a door to other kinds of experiences (Wright 2009: 136).

However, language teachers are faced with a difficult task when planning to use an authentic story in theme-based instruction. First, when selecting an authentic story for language teaching, they must take care that the book is appropriate and relevant to the children's age, language level, conceptual level, needs and interests. Then, they must decide which language functions, structures, vocabulary, concepts and skills should be reinforced in the activities based on the

story. Appropriate pre-, while- and post-storytelling activities and materials must be prepared and designed. As Cameron (2008: 159) puts it: „Bringing the world into the classroom by using stories and themes creates different demands for the foreign language teacher. The teacher has to work from the theme or story to make the content accessible to learners and to construct activities that offer language learning opportunities, and in doing so needs many of the skills and language knowledge of text book writers.“

The challenges of creating effective thematic units based on stories can be met by careful preparation of storytelling and by detailed planning of all classroom activities (Shin 2007). First, it means deciding which vocabulary and structures must be pre-taught and which can be understood in the context of the story or practised through actions and TPR (Total Physical Response) activities. Then, it is necessary to prepare a script that will incorporate both the known and new words and grammatical structures, taking care that the new ones are just above the children’s level of understanding in order to provide conditions for language acquisition. The script should also include the questions that will be asked at each stage of storytelling for encouraging prediction and checking understanding, so that children can be kept engaged throughout the lesson. The more children understand the story, the more interested in listening to the story and in reading it they will be. Therefore, the questions should allow children to make predictions about the outcome and about the events, either in English or in Serbian (in which case the teacher’s task should be to try to recast childrens’ ideas in English and thus keep the lesson communicative). This process adds an emotional component to language learning and increases the possibility of learned vocabulary, structures or functions finding a place in a long-term memory (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010: 160).

Authentic stories are always very well illustrated, thus supporting the language with appealing visuals. Pictures provide visual support and scaffold comprehension. Further support comes from the text itself: repeated structures or patterns, rhyme and rhythm, familiar storyline and logical sequence. Finally, teacher’s skills in applying specific strategies and storytelling techniques while reading or telling a story can greatly increase children’s understanding and enjoyment (Brewster et al. 2004: 197):

- using gestures, mime, facial expressions;
- varying the pace, tone and volume of voice;
- disguising voice for different characters;
- adding dramatic effect when appropriate;
- making sound effects if possible;
- encouraging children to participate by repeating key words and phrases;
- repeating, expanding and reformulating;

- making comments about illustrations.

We will explore how to integrate the story *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato* (American title is *I Will Never NOT EVER Eat a Tomato*) by Lauren Child, into a thematic unit titled *Vegetables*. The story is about siblings, Charlie and Lola, who sometimes have their dinner alone, Charlie taking care that his younger sister Lola eats proper meals based on vegetables. However, Lola is a fussy eater and refuses all vegetables and other food offered by her brother until he plays a trick on her and makes her voluntarily try various vegetables and other food, which results in Lola's appreciation of vegetable tastes. Charlie, being an older brother, is patient and kind, and both children are rather imaginative and energetic.

It is crucial to check if the story satisfies general criteria for being used in teaching English as a foreign language. Such a story should, above all, meet the children's needs and appeal to the teacher. Joannou-Georgiou and Ramirez Verdugo (2010: 143–144) argue that a selected story should have:

- a clear storyline that allows children to use their knowledge of the world to understand the story;
- plenty of repetition that appears naturally in the story and allows children to hear the language in various contexts;
- opportunities for participation, through guessing what will happen/come next, describing the pictures, repeating words and phrases, or answering the questions, so that children are kept engaged throughout the storytelling process;
- helpful illustrations that support understanding;
- appropriate linguistic level that allows children to understand most of the story; it is generally considered that 95% of vocabulary in a reading text should be familiar to children; however, when telling a story to children, there should also be the opportunities for them to guess the meaning and learn new vocabulary in the context of the story.

Evaluation of the story *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato* indicates that the storyline is simple and clear, with logical sequence of events. Repetition comes naturally through the characters' dialogue: '*carrots* are for rabbits', 'I don't ever eat *carrots*', 'why are those *carrots* there', 'you think these are *carrots*', 'these are not *carrots*', 'they look just like *carrots* to me', 'how can they be *carrots*', '*carrots* don't grow on Jupiter'. There are many opportunities for guessing what Charlie and Lola, the story characters, will do/eat/say next, and illustrations are a great visual support. The illustrator, Lauren Child, uses very interesting collage pictures in which she combines drawings with real pictures of vegetables and meals, in full colour. Illustrations brilliantly support the content and make the text comprehensible (the author was awarded for her illustrations in 2000). In respect to the linguistic level of the story, there is a need to pre-

teach some of the new vocabulary to the children (*carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage, mushrooms, rice, baked beans, peas, sausages, peas*) but there are some cognates (*spaghetti, Jupiter*) and vocabulary whose meaning can easily be guessed from the context and the pictures (*Moon drops, fishsticks, mashed potato, tasty*). To conclude, the story can be used with Grade 2 students without any need to be simplified or adapted.

##### 5. THEMATIC UNIT *VEGETABLES* BASED ON THE AUTHENTIC STORY *I WILL NOT EVER NEVER EAT A TOMATO* BY LAUREN CHILD (AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR)

The theme *Vegetables* is one of the units in primary Grade 2 Science curriculum in Serbian schools. The science content involves teaching the names of vegetables, describing the process of vegetable growth from planting vegetable seeds to harvesting vegetables, describing the conditions for vegetable growth (the role of water and of the sun's light and heat), discussing the role of vegetables in human nutrition, their different tastes, and their importance for a healthy diet. All these concepts lend themselves perfectly to language teaching as they are not too sophisticated in English for Grade 2 language learners and can be taught using simple language that beginning level learners can understand and use. Moreover, the topic of vegetables/diet is part of children's everyday life and experiences, and as such fits perfectly into the foreign language classroom: children are generally motivated to speak about issues related to their life experiences and interests.

However, it must be noted Grade 2 students in Serbia are learning English orally, may be starting to read sight words, and have not met any names of vegetables in the coursebooks used in the classroom. On the other hand, they can describe objects in English (*it's; it has; they're; they have*), inquire about and express likes and dislikes (*do you like; I like/don't like*), use the present continuous for continuous present action (*I'm planting/watering*), and narrate personal experiences using the present simple (*I usually have/eat; what do you have/eat*). Still, they might find an authentic book challenging, both with respect to vocabulary and grammar structures, mainly due to the extensive use of the past simple for narration.

One of the ways to deal with these two big challenges is to pre-teach some of the new vocabulary before starting the thematic unit with students, and to let children learn some of the words and functions in the context of the story. There is evidence that children are capable of picking up new words while listening to the story (Cameron 2008: 164). As regards the past simple, it should be used

without any explanation, relying for comprehension on the positive transfer from children's experiences with story form and narrative structures in their native language (Ellis and Brewster 2002: 10). Language acquisition methodology advocates exposing learners to the language that is as natural as possible, which means not postponing the past tense until learners can analyse it, but using it in story form and allowing children to guess the meaning from the context (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010: 4; Ellis and Brewster 2002: 8; Wright 2009: 160). Stories are natural vehicles for exposing children to the past tense, believes Wright (*ibid.*); he argues that children's active use of the past tense may come much later and that young learners should be exposed to grammar structures as lexical chunks without explicit grammar explanations. Surely, it is not necessary that children understand every word/phrase/structure in a story to be able to appreciate it. Children concentrate on the meaning, not on the form, and their comprehension is mainly scaffolded through pictures and the teacher's storytelling techniques, like mime, acting out meaning, and explanation / translation of new words.

### 5.1. THEMATIC UNIT OBJECTIVES

The thematic unit should include the outcomes related to the content, the outcomes for language in use (functional language) and culture outcomes, as three major groups of teaching outcomes (Curtain and Dahlberg 2010: 155). The focus should clearly be on language in use, i.e. communicative language functions, rather than on vocabulary lists or grammatical structures (*ibid.*). Consequently, language objectives should be closely connected to content knowledge/concepts and hands-on activities related to it.

Language objectives: In this particular thematic unit language objectives will involve teaching and/or practising:

- Vocabulary and science concepts:
  - names of vegetables: *carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage, peas*;
  - names of food/dishes: *mushrooms, rice, baked beans, sausages, spaghetti, eggs, cheese, bananas, apples, fishsticks, mashed potatoes*;
  - colours: *green, orange, red, yellow, white*;
  - adjectives: *tasty; highest; rare; pointest; small*;
  - science concepts: *seeds, soil, to plant, to water, to grow, heat, light, Jupiter, peak, ocean, sea, mountain, cloud*.
- Language functions:
  - describing different vegetables and conditions for vegetable growth: *it's; it has; they're; they have*;

- asking about and expressing likes and dislikes related to a variety of vegetable tastes: *I like/don't like; do you like; I'm not fond of; they're my favourites;*
- inquiring about and narrating personal experiences related to a diary kept to record vegetable meals in daily nutrition: *I usually have/eat; what do you have/eat;*
- refusing: *I will never eat; I do not (ever) eat; I'm not fond of;*
- describing typical vegetable diet in English speaking countries: *they have;*
- describing how vegetable taste: *quite tasty;*
- offering food: *what about;*
- polite request: *will you pass me.*
- Grammar structures:
  - the present continuous for continuous present action (speaking about planting/watering vegetable seeds): *I'm planting/watering;*
  - the present simple for habitual action (usual diet): *I usually have/eat; what do you have/eat;*
  - the present simple for factual information: *they don't grow on Jupiter.*

Content objectives:

- understanding the process and conditions of vegetable growth from planting vegetable seeds to harvesting vegetables;
- understanding the role of vegetables in human nutrition and their importance for a healthy diet.

Culture objectives:

- understanding cultural differences related to typical meals of children in English speaking countries and a variety of vegetables they usually have.

Objectives should be defined within the unit plan inventory as measurable and observable outcomes of the functions, structures, vocabulary, materials and activities to be used in the thematic unit (ibid. 168–169).

## 5.2. THEMATIC UNIT ACTIVITIES

When using a story in language teaching, it is necessary to think carefully about three distinctive stages (Ioanou-Georgiou and Pavlou 2010: 147–154; Wright 2009: 23–63):

- a) Pre-storytelling stage, including activities before the story;
- b) While-storytelling stage, with activities during the story;
- c) After-storytelling stage, with activities after the story.

These stages do not equal lesson periods, but can take up as much time as needed by the children to achieve the objectives set in the areas of language,

content and culture. The best way to organise activities is to put them in a chart to cover content and language. The balance of all four skills must be achieved, starting with pre-listening or pre-reading activities that prepare students for listening and reading input, and proceeding with listening or reading input activities, building listening or reading skills, and finally involving speaking and writing activities. Shin (2007: 5) suggests that activities should be organised and ordered by:

- varying the task and language skills;
- choosing the activities that are the most useful to particular group of learners;
- ordering the tasks to mirror the real life application of the tasks;
- connecting one activity to the next (from receptive to productive skills);
- sequencing the content in order to recycle language and scaffold students' learning.

A big challenge is to make activities really communicative, focused on genuine exchange of information and able to engage children in purposeful interaction. It can be achieved with information gap activities, as they give young learners a reason to think, talk, exchange factual information, and use language for practical reasons. Moreover, activities like games, stories, songs, rhymes, graphing activities, role plays, dramatisations, dialogues, and presentations as pair and group work, can easily engage students in both the content and the language. It is very important to keep in mind the fact that content concepts and new language can be made comprehensible with the use of contextual clues, like visuals and concrete objects (realia), supported with concrete, hands-on and activity-oriented teaching.

As receptive skills should come first, we may choose total physical response (TPR) activities as pre-listening activities, and flashcards with vegetable pictures and names for word reading as a pre-reading activity. Productive skills should be included later to involve speaking (first choral, then individual) and writing (first copying individual words, then writing simple sentences). Activities should be ordered to include controlled activities first (reading flashcards; copying individual words), then less controlled and free activities (role play and interview; writing simple sentences to express preferences; doing a class survey of likes/dislikes; creating a graph to represent survey results). Presentation activities may involve listening to a story, discussing eating preferences and doing a class survey. Practice activities may include completing flashcards with vegetable pictures and names by drawing parts of vegetables that are missing, colouring and cutting them, planting vegetable seeds, and doing a role play. All these activities can make four or five consecutive lessons of the thematic unit *Vegetables*.

a) Pre-storytelling stage is the preparation stage in which children's interest and motivation are raised and the context for the story is created. Wright (2009: 23–32) argues that activities before the story should help children to understand the story. These activities can be related to pre-teaching new vocabulary through pictures, objects or mime, and also to consolidating new key words by providing activities in which these words will be used in new contexts and thus memorised. Wright (ibid.) argues that it is not enough to help children understand the new words, but the teacher should help children to make new words their own through the activities such as memory games, picture-word matching, drawing, creating word webs or a personal picture dictionary. In this stage it is also important that the teachers decide which key new words can be introduced later, during storytelling, through context or translation. The activities in this stage should help children to review the language of the story they already know (both vocabulary and grammar structures).

Here are our suggestions for the pre-storytelling activities created for the thematic unit *Vegetables* (Savić 2012b) to be used before reading the story *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato*. They are carefully sequenced to suit the linguistic and conceptual knowledge of Grade 2 students.

Activity 1: Put the large pictures of vegetables on the walls, call out the names of vegetables and ask individual children to point to the right picture. *Materials*: large pictures of vegetables.

Activity 2: Point to the pictures of vegetables on the walls and have children say the names of vegetables in chorus. *Materials*: large pictures of vegetables.

Activity 3: Introduce a simple chant with actions (mime eating); repeat the chant several times together with children, then replace *potato* with *tomato*, and do it again. *Materials*: two flashcards showing a potato and a tomato, or a real potato and a tomato.

One potato, two potatoes,  
three potatoes, four;  
five potatoes, six potatoes,  
seven potatoes, MORE.

Activity 4: Have children plant vegetable seeds in a cardboard box with a layer of soil (with a compartment for each different kind of vegetable) or in the school garden; first discuss conditions necessary for growing vegetables; then invite pairs to plant vegetable seeds (each pair plants one different kind of vegetable) using the seeds from packets with English vegetable names on them; have pairs describe what they are doing. *Materials*: a cardboard box with a layer of soil and

compartments for each different kind of vegetable (for planting vegetables in the classroom), seed packets, a bottle of water.

- Activity 5: Stick in random order a set of vegetable pictures and a set of printed vegetable names on one side of the board, and the same sets on the other side of the board; have two students representing two groups come to the board to match vegetable pictures to their printed names, one at a time; the winner is the group that first finishes the activity successfully. *Materials*: two sets of vegetable pictures and printed vegetable names.
- Activity: 6: Stick one set of flashcards of vegetable pictures on the board and play ‘What’s missing’ game: stick the cards on the board, ask children to close their eyes, remove a card, rearrange the other flashcards and ask: *What’s missing?*; children look up and the first child who guesses correctly gets to hold the flashcard; continue until there are only two flashcards left; the winner is the child who has most flashcards; repeat the procedure with vegetable names, without pictures. *Materials*: a set of flashcards of vegetable pictures.
- Activity 7: Have children create their own word webs of vegetable names learned. *Materials*: children’s notebooks and pencils.
- Activity 8: Show the book cover and have children predict who and what the story is going to be about (can be done in children’s native language). *Materials*: the book.
- Activity 9: Make copies of some pictures from the book and ask children to work in pairs and predict the right sequence. *Materials*: photocopies of pictures from the book, a set for each pair of children (or one set, marked with letters, to be displayed on the board).

b) While-storytelling stage involves activities that can be used during the first, second or even the third reading/telling of the story. The teacher should decide whether the first reading/telling of the story should be only a listening activity providing enjoyment. The process of reading should provide enough scaffolding for comprehension: visuals, disguised voice, pauses, variety of tone and pace of the voice, even sound effects, so that children with all kinds of intelligences (visual, aural, oral, or kinaesthetic) can benefit from the support. Checking children’s comprehension can be done by asking them to perform action verbs, point to the right object in the picture, show the flashcard representing the object, or by asking comprehension questions prepared in advance. More support can be provided by repeating or expanding words or phrases, reformulating or translating them. These activities can be very useful during the story:

- Activity 10: Stop at any point of reading/telling the story and ask children to predict what will happen next.
- Activity 11: Stop at any point of reading/telling the story and ask comprehension questions related to the part of the story already read; e.g. *Is Lola happy or angry here? Why? Does Lola like carrots now? Why (not)?*
- Activity 12: Invite a personal response by asking children what they can feel, taste, hear or smell at a certain point of reading/telling the story (Wright 2009: 34).
- Activity 13: Ask children to mime an action, or a feeling, or a character, while listening to the story.
- Activity 14: Ask children to sequence the flashcards with vegetables/food in the order they appear in the story. *Materials:* flashcards with vegetables/food mentioned in the story.
- Activity 15: Ask children to sequence key words or sentences written on strips of paper as they appear in the story. *Materials:* strips with key words/sentences from the story.
- Activity 16: During the second or third reading/telling of the story, invite children to chant certain lines in groups.
- Activity 17: During the second or third reading/telling of the story pause before a word/phrase children have learned and ask them to tell the word/phrase that is missing.

c) After-storytelling stage should involve follow-up activities that can integrate all skills and consolidate new knowledge acquired in the thematic unit based on the story. Children should be given plenty of opportunities to use their imagination and creativity in relation to the story events. Story mapping is one of possible activities that might help children remember the story better, compare the characters, or memorise the order of events.

- Activity 18: Give children a story mapping graphic organiser and ask them to fill in the facts related to the setting, problem, characters and resolution. *Materials:* story mapping graphic organiser.
- Activity 19: Ask children to retell the story as a group, by throwing a ball to each other (who catches the ball must continue retelling the story).
- Activity 20: Give children strips with sentences from the story and ask them to put them into the right order.
- Activity 21: Ask children to think of a different ending for the story.
- Activity 22: Ask children to act out a scene from the story.
- Activity 23: Instruct children to do a Class survey of likes/dislikes related to vegetables; put students in groups of 5–6 and give each group a copy of the survey sheet; instruct students to ask about each other's

preferences related to vegetables in their groups and record answers using the grid; instruct them to tick a positive answer and to put a cross for the negative answer; model: *Do you like potatoes? Yes, I do.* (use appropriate facial expression, e.g. smile), *No, I don't.* (make a grimace); monitor students while doing the survey and help them with vocabulary and with recording the answers; in the end collect all surveys and help students draw a bar graph on a poster and display it on the classroom wall. *Materials:* a class survey sheet for each group of 5–6 students, paper for the poster, felt-tip pens.

Activity 24: Ask children to discuss the importance of vegetables in a healthy diet and to prepare a poster that will make vegetables more appealing to all children/fussy eaters. *Materials:* poster paper and markers.

Activity 25: In groups, pairs or as individuals, children make a book of the story and design the book cover.

Activity 26: Have students work in groups to create a wall display explaining why they love eating certain vegetables.

Activity 27: Have children write a letter to one of the characters in the book and say how they feel about eating certain vegetables.

Learner autonomy can be encouraged by asking learners to choose activities they find most useful or interesting. Developing a project to incorporate all language the students have learned is another way of developing student autonomy. Shin (2007: 6) argues that the project should connect all of the lessons in the thematic unit and give the students an opportunity to use the language communicatively in a realistic situation. It should further encourage students to cooperate with each other and allow them to make choices and think critically about the subject matter. Possible projects within the thematic unit *Vegetables* based on the story *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato* can be making a vegetable calendar (with seasons/months when certain vegetables are available at the local market) or showing the process of growing vegetables, harvesting them and using them to prepare healthy and tasty meals.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Language teaching for beginning learners should involve context-rich and meaningful environments (Genesee 2001). In a young learner classroom such an environment can be best created through theme-based instruction integrated with storytelling activities. Stories provide both life experience and language experience, help children to develop their imagination and creativity, foster their critical thinking and cultural awareness. Above all, stories are sources of enjoyment and fun for children and allow teachers to create a relaxed atmosphere in which

children’s engagement is enhanced and language fluency developed through genuine meaningful communication. To sum up, by connecting authentic stories to themes from the wider primary curriculum, English language teachers in Serbia may considerably increase the effectiveness of their English instruction.

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## UPOTREBA PRIČA U TEMATSKOJ NASTAVI

*Rezime:* Rad istražuje mogućnosti integrisanja priča za decu sa tematskom nastavom engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu. Najpre se razmatraju prednosti tematske nastave i upotrebe priča u nastavi engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu: tematska nastava omogućava da se strani jezik poveže sa drugim nastavnim predmetima kroz kroskurikularne teme i tako obezbede realne komunikacione situacije i mogućnost da se strani jezik koristi na nov, kreativan i zabavan način; priče predstavljaju prirodni kontekst za razvoj jezičkih veština i omogućavaju njihovo strukturiranje u tematskoj nastavi. U radu se dalje ispituje potencijal autentičnih priča za obezbeđivanje uslova neophodnih za usvajanje stranog jezika. Metodčki principi usvajanja stranog jezika podrazumevaju zadovoljavanje sledećih preduslova: jezički input mora biti ispunjen značenjem i interesantan učeniku; mora biti razumljiv i nešto malo iznad učenikovog nivoa znanja; i najzad, gramatičke strukture ne treba da budu pojednostavljene u jezičkom inputu u početnim fazama usvajanja stranog jezika jer je fokus na razumevanju značenja, a ne na jezičkim formama. Rad daje predloge za upotrebu autentičnih priča u nastavi engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu, uopšteno, i za njihovu integraciju sa tematskom nastavom, posebno. U radu se dalje ispituju mogućnosti za integraciju autentične priče za decu *I Will Not Ever NEVER Eat a Tomato*, autora i ilustratora Loren Čajld (Lauren Child, 2000) sa tematskom jedinicom Povrće (*Vegetables*) u nastavi engleskog jezika u 2. razredu osnovne škole u Srbiji. Utvrđuje se da li priča zadovoljava sve kriterijume za korišćenje u nastavi

engleskog kao stranog jezika na ovom uzrastu. Zatim se definišu tri grupe ciljeva i ishoda tematske nastave zasnovane na ovoj priči (jezički, predmetni i kulturni), i kreiraju tri grupe nastavnih aktivnosti za korišćenje pre pričanja/čitanja ove priče, u toku i posle njenog pričanja/čitanja. U svim aktivnostima fokus je na komunikaciji i jeziku u upotrebi (jezičkim funkcijama), dok su gramatičke konstrukcije sporedne i ne objašnjavaju se eksplicitno, već se uvežbavaju kao sastavni deo jezičkih fraza/sintagmi. Zaključuje se da integrisanje priča sa tematskom nastavom može znatno doprineti angažovanju učenika u nastavi engleskog jezika, uticati povoljno na njihovu motivaciju, unaprediti fluentnost i doprineti njihovom jezičkom i kognitivnom razvoju, što ih čini sredstvom koje je neophodno koristiti u nastavi engleskog jezika na mlađem uzrastu u Srbiji.

*Кljučне речи:* tematska nastava, autentična priča, učenici mlađeg uzrasta, kontekst ispunjen značenjem, predmetni sadržaj, razvoj fluentnosti