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The Relationship between a Text and an Illustration: Illustrators' and Primary School Teachers' Perspective[2]

Extended summary

Illustrations are an effective means of communication in children's literature and textbooks. A visual representation supports understanding and adoption of the read material, not only in the domain of literary texts, but also in the areas such as mathematics or sciences. However, it is important to note that the facilitating role of illustrations in understanding the reading material largely depends on the following factors: a) the quality of an illustration and its correlation with the text in terms of content; b) the ability of a reader to integrate the content of the text and the illustration; and c) the level of success of an adult as a mediator in connecting the text and the illustration during the children's reading process.

The paper focuses on examining the quality of the relationship between an illustration and a text and their integration in the process of understanding the text that has been read by: a) monitoring the process of illustration from the perspective of illustrators and their role relative to readers and publishing houses; b) examining the perspective of the primary school teachers as moderators in the process of connecting illustrations with texts, and their insights regarding the definition of a good quality illustration in a primer. The relationship between a text and an illustration is a complex question and a continual challenge for textbook writers, readers, as well as researchers. According to the pertaining literature, two forms of monitoring this relationship can be singled out: a. by means of spatial organization and b. by looking for the connection in terms of meaning.

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The paper is a part of the broader research aimed at exploring, on the one hand, the quality of the relationship between a text and an illustration in a textbook/primer, and, on the other hand, the perception of teachers as users of these textbooks/primers and illustrators as creators of the visual identity of the textbooks and primers. In the first phase, the researchers applied a system of codifying the quality of the relationship between a text and an illustration, described by means of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the obtained data. In the second phase of the research, a qualitative research was conducted using a focus group with primary school teachers and an interview with an illustrator.

The approach of *key informers* was used in the research. The subjects of the research, five primary school teachers from different schools in Belgrade and one illustrator were selected for this research in accordance with the set of the research criteria: the profession of the subjects and their previous experience regarding specific skills and knowledge required in their profession. All audio-visual data were created during conversations with the teachers in the focus group and the interview with the illustrator.

Several categories can be singled out from the teachers' and the illustrator's narratives: the categories referring to and explaining the relationship between a text and an illustration, and the categories describing the scope of teachers and illustrators in the process of the text and illustration integration, as well as their motivation. The critical attitude of the illustrator and the teachers towards publishing and the importance of the illustration is a common point in the narratives. They stressed out that it is necessary to strike a proper balance to be able to establish any relationship between the text and the illustration. Text illustration is a complex mechanism in which everyone involved in a textbook/primer design should bear their share of responsibility. To enable children to understand what they read and build new meanings, all standards of a good quality textbook illustration must be fulfilled: from a complete representation of colours and details, to conveying emotions to create communication with children and encourage specific cognitive processes in them. Primary school teachers acknowledge the significance of the illustration in terms of text explanation and they are aware that they are the link in building the text-illustration relationship in the classroom.

As far the creative process and illustration design are concerned, we found out that the factors impacting a textbook illustration are the illustrator's personal characteristics and his/her stylistic expression, as well as the external factors such as timeframe and the number of pages in a textbook. The illustrators' perspective implies acknowledging interests and needs of children of different age groups, which is achieved by a continued research. When children design illustrations, which is very often a part of their task at the lessons dedicated to the analysis of texts in Serbian, teachers tend to limit their creative process by asking children to present only partially and in basic terms what they found to be most striking in the text. The real illustration is linked only to art lessons and the skills of drawing and colouring. From the perspective of the multimedia learning, it is assumed that the processing of language and visual information occurs simultaneously, which cannot be claimed for the primary school teachers who lack the knowledge of the two-way relationship between a text and an illustration, and do not fully realize the significance of visual literacy in the further development of reading competencies.

By introducing the illustrator's and teachers' perspectives in one part of the qualitative research, we gained insights into a broader context of the process of the textbook design and defined the roles of the key actors in it. We tried to examine the role of individual actors in terms of the accountability for a large number of illustrations that have only a decorative function. It is assumed that textbook design is a very delicate and complex task requiring team work, a lot of time, different skills, and creativity. In the context of this paper, further research should be focused on the relationship between an illustration and a text in teaching process. To conclude with, it is necessary to develop a further framework for teacher education in terms of stressing the importance of illustrations for the learning process in teaching.

Keywords: illustration, text, perspective, illustrator, primary school teachers.

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