



## DEVELOPING SENSITIVE AND CRITICAL AWARENESS TOWARDS MIGRATION: AN INTERFACULTY EXPERIENCE BASED ON A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH AND LITERARY CONVERSATION

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**ABSTRACT:** The main objective of this study is to examine the increase in critical and sensitive awareness of migration through the use of the silent picturebook *Migrants* (2019) by Issa Watanabe, within the context of an interfaculty experience, based on a Human Rights Education approach and the use of literary conversation methodology, and carried out at both the Teacher Training and the Philology, Translation and Communication higher education centers at the Universitat de València during 2024-2025 academic year. By means of this picturebook, students and lecturers have seen how the illustrated literature becomes a tool that contributes to shaping our mental and experiential realities, apart from developing a critical and sensitive awareness towards migration, taking into consideration minorities' rights and their dignification. The methodology employed includes the context of the intervention, which collected the 125 participants' interventions enrolled in the modules "Foreign Language Teachers: English" and "American Literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries" respectively, the procedure (justification of the topic, research meetings and the design of the sessions) and the data collection instruments (group tasks, mini-assemblies, debates and focus group, mainly). Regarding the results, these indicate an increase in participants' critical and sensitive awareness of the migrant phenomena, as well as the promotion of a global understanding of the silent picturebook as a socializing agent in addressing challenging issues inherent to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, the use of this kind of format allows participants to activate their oral culture and develop their

English-speaking skills, through the literary conversation methodology, in order to create stories, share ideas and design activities.

**KEYWORDS:** migration, silent picturebook, Human Rights approach, literary conversation, critical awareness.

## **DESARROLLO DE UNA CONCIENCIACIÓN CRÍTICA Y SENSIBLE HACIA LA MIGRACIÓN: UNA EXPERIENCIA INTERFACULTATIVA BASADA EN EL ENFOQUE EN DERECHOS HUMANOS Y LA CONVERSACIÓN LITERARIA**

**RESUMEN:** El objetivo principal de este estudio es examinar el aumento de la concienciación crítica y sensible hacia la migración mediante el uso del álbum ilustrado sin palabras *Migrants*, en el contexto de una experiencia interfacultativa, basada en la metodología del enfoque de los derechos humanos en educación y en la conversación literaria, y llevada a cabo tanto en la Facultad de Formación del Profesorado como en la de Filología, Traducción y Comunicación de la Universitat de València durante el curso académico 2024-2025. A través del álbum ilustrado sin palabras *Migrants* (2019) de Issa Watanabe, tanto estudiantes como docentes han observado cómo la literatura ilustrada se convierte en una herramienta que contribuye a conformar nuestras realidades mentales y vivenciales, aparte de desarrollar una concienciación crítica y sensible hacia la migración, teniendo en cuenta los derechos de las minorías y su dignificación. La metodología empleada incluye el contexto de la intervención, el cual recogía las contribuciones de las 125 personas participantes matriculadas en los módulos “Lengua Extranjera para Maestros: Inglés” y “Literatura de los Estados Unidos II: de los siglos XIX al XXI” respectivamente, el procedimiento (justificación del tema, reuniones de investigación y diseño de las sesiones) y los instrumentos de recogida de datos (tareas grupales, mini-asambleas, debates y grupos focales, principalmente). En cuanto a los resultados, estos indican un aumento de la concienciación crítica y sensible de los y las participantes ante los fenómenos migratorios, así como la promoción de una comprensión global del álbum ilustrado sin palabras como agente socializador para abordar cuestiones desafiantes inherentes al siglo XXI. Asimismo, el uso de este tipo de formato permite a las personas participantes activar su cultura oral y desarrollar sus habilidades orales en inglés, a través de la metodología de la conversación literaria, para crear historias, compartir ideas y diseñar actividades.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** migración, álbum ilustrado sin palabras, Enfoque de los Derechos Humanos, conversación literaria, concienciación crítica.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration as a global phenomenon constitutes a highly relevant theme in various areas of society, particularly within the education sphere, where classroom diversity and heterogeneity are one of its most noticeable consequences. In this context, migration emerges as a compelling challenge in the holistic development of the human being from childhood —a dimension that is intrinsically linked to teacher training across all educational stages and areas of specializations.

The migratory phenomenon can be examined from two distinct yet interrelated perspectives, each offering valuable insights into its complex nature. From a rights-based perspective, migration is understood as an expression of individual freedom and agency (De León Vargas, 2021). As established in various international legal frameworks and human rights declarations, it encompasses the right to seek better living conditions, pursue personal and professional development, and escape from adverse socio-political or economic contexts. This view emphasizes human dignity and the legitimacy of mobility in a globalized world. Conversely, a more critical and often stigmatizing perspective frames migration as a social problem or even a threat. Within this discourse, migrants are frequently portrayed as belonging to a socially vulnerable group —marginalized, economically disadvantaged, and in need of assistance or control (De León Vargas, 2021; Onofre, 2023).

The coexistence of these narratives underscores the need for a nuanced and ethically grounded approach in the analysis of migration, particularly in fields such as education, where these perspectives directly impact inclusion policies and pedagogical practices. Ultimately, the way migration is conceptualized within educational discourse has profound implications for teacher training, curriculum design, classroom management, and student outcomes since it specifically affects integral welfare (Peláez et al., 2021).

In this sense, the main objective of this research study is to examine the increase of a critical awareness on migration in pre-service teachers in Early Childhood and Secondary Education. The study seeks to understand how future educators perceive migratory processes and how these perceptions influence their readiness to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments in increasingly diverse and heterogeneous classrooms. Furthermore, another main objective of this study is to explore how the use of a silent picturebook can foster the development of a critical sensitivity toward sustainability and social justice, particularly in connection with migration. By engaging with visual narratives, the participants in this study are encouraged to reflect on complex global issues through an interdisciplinary and empathetic lens, thereby enriching their educational practice and promoting transformative pedagogical interventions, based on literary conversation methodology.

Besides, participants in this research have the idiosyncrasy of being enrolled in different study programmes, both with a clear pedagogical approach but oriented to

different stages. On the one hand, students from Early Childhood Education Degree attended to two different group sessions based on *Migrants* (2019) by Issa Watanabe. The same silent picturebook, since this format can be applied to different educational stages due to its pedagogic potential and diversity in theme, was the main material in group sessions with the English Studies Degree. Then, a final interfaculty session took place to delve into the synergies and possible divergences in dealing with migration theme in different educational stages: Early Childhood and Secondary Education.

Regarding the structure of this research, firstly, a theoretical framework based on Migration, Human Rights approach in Education and Silent Picturebooks is presented. Then, the methodology includes the context of the intervention, the participants, the materials and the design of the different sessions, including the interfaculty final one. Finally, the results are described and limitations and considerations for future and complementary lines of research are developed.

## **2. THE PHENOMENON OF MIGRATION THROUGH A HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION APPROACH**

The migratory phenomenon shapes a human society given that one out of every thirty people in the world is a migrant. In this line, according to the most recent estimate by the IOM, there were approximately 281 million migrants in the world in 2020, a figure equivalent to 3.6% of the world's population (IOM, 2024). Not surprisingly, migratory movements inspire efforts in many policy areas as well as pioneering research in different academic disciplines.

Regarding the literary sphere, as Benlloch-Doménech and Barbé-Villarubia (2020) remind us, in order to understand the narratives of migrants, it is necessary to be aware that there is great migratory diversity. Currently, the best-known migrations are those derived from economic motives, which are reduced to labor motives. Thus, migrants who move for other reasons, such as conflicts, wars, famine, natural disasters or situations in which the person is at risk for religious, political or gender reasons, among others, are being ignored.

This feeling of invisibility and marginalization leads to a need to promote an education based on a Human Rights approach to enhance the increase of the critical awareness on migration among pre-service teachers in university classrooms. Based on Rodino's premises (2015), the dimension of greatest interest for this research is the Human Rights Education (HRE), which has as its fundamental objective the promotion of each individual's personal and unique understanding of their responsibility in making human rights a reality within their specific community and society at large. Moreover, it aims to contribute to the prevention of human rights abuses, the promotion of equality and sustainable development, and the enhancement of individual participation in decision-making processes within democratic systems (World Programme for Human Rights Education, s.f.).

Apart from that, this approach is intrinsically combined with social justice in terms of distribution, recognition and participation (Rawls, 2010) and with the inclusion of a critical pedagogy that provides tools for the emancipation of individuals and the different groups that are part of a society. Besides, this active dimension leads to the consolidation of a democratic exercise of civic participation, in which educators can serve as guides. Similarly, this active component influences significantly in the development of a key competence in human rights education (Murphy and Cheallacháin, 2025), which must include an inclusive and intercultural perspective (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2019), at the same time based on the so-called Human Rights Culture in the educational field (Rodríguez, 2017).

This Human Rights Culture is a key pillar in the development of programs in Higher Education. Among the main research lines, interdisciplinarity is found and, in this sense, Higher Education has the opportunity of making future graduates closer to society's problems and to meaningful real-life issues (Gómez and Raya, 2018). Thus, through a solid education in Human Rights within Higher Education, students are able to understand the urgent need to dignify and give visibility to individuals belonging to these marginalized groups (Rodríguez and Ramos, 2023). In this regard, Guichot-Reina (2020) also notes the importance of social justice dealing with migration and Human Rights, especially in aspects such as the essential recognition of diversity, the respect towards each individual's inherent dignity, and the participation in meaningful curriculum decision-making. In the same way, such participation contributes substantially to the development of a liberating education (Vogelfanger, 2020).

### **3. SILENT PICTUREBOOKS AND ITS POTENTIAL IN THE ACTIVATION OF ORAL CULTURE, LITERARY CONVERSATION AND IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL LITERACY**

Before addressing the conceptualization of the silent or wordless picturebook format, it is essential to revisit Bader's (1976) timeless definition of the picturebook in general, in which she refers to it as a "total design". This format, which has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry—particularly since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—highlights the presence of three essential elements: two that have traditionally been discussed—text and image—and the various relationships established between them, and more recently, a third element has been added: materiality. This latter component emphasizes reading not only as a cognitive and intellectual act but also as a physical one, where the body plays a fundamental role (Tabernero-Sala, 2018, 2025 and Alaca, 2019). Another interesting definition is the one elaborated by Vouillamoz (2022), taking into account Prades (2017) premises, and where the author describes a picturebook as a literary artefact open to freedom, originality, experimentation and innovation.

A silent or wordless picturebook, also coined with the term *Mute Wonders* by Marcella Terrusi (2017), as its name suggests, advocates for a visual narrative

experience and enables the reader to develop creative skills while exploring new ways of reading and constructing stories through design and personal interpretation grounded in cultural and social frameworks (Kress, 2010). Moreover, this format contributes to educate aesthetically, intelligently and critically readers' "eyes" through the methodology of *Slow looking* (Tishman, 2017) that facilitates a critical observation of the world through the different sequences of images present in this kind of books. This process of critical observation is really important since it helps educators understand how readers respond to images and illustrations and all the explicit and implicit visual elements in these books (Evans, 2015; Arizpe and Styles, 2016).

Taking into consideration the former process, silent picturebooks are intended to be understood as a visual narrative. In this line, according to Bosch (2014), this format is "una narración, en formato de libro, basada en la secuencia de imágenes (fijas e impresas), en la que la página funciona como una unidad de secuencia" (p. 71). Thus, this sequence unit composed of images constitutes a narrative in itself, which the viewer/reader engages with in order to undertake a process of visual, narrative, artistic, and cultural decoding, informed by their own personal background. Moreover, in this process the viewer/reader, who must be solidary (Bosch and Duran, 2009) and take risks for predictions (Arizpe et al., 2014), activates and develops their visual and literary competences at the same time so as to complete the blank spaces by means of their imagination and experience (Costa and Ramos, 2021). The action of completing these spaces can be also considered a game since this element is a crucial one in the architectural and aesthetic construction of the picturebook (Dueñas and Beltrán, 2024).

Among the didactic possibilities of this unique format, collaborative oral storytelling and the development of communicative oral expression among students stand out (Colón, 2023). In this regard, Colón's research is particularly relevant in examining how readers respond to the linear narratives found in silent picturebooks. The study draws conclusions such as the supportive collaboration among all members of the reading group, the predominance of descriptive, cumulative, and linear conversations, and consequently, the emergence of chained individual interventions (p. 82). This process intertwines the format of the silent picturebook with oral culture, as represented by collaborative reading aloud through visual, artistic, and cultural interpretation.

Moreover, this format is essential in order to develop the so-called multimodal literacies among students, especially the pre-service teachers, who must be aware of the educational importance of introducing their prospective students to the ways in which meaning is constructed through the interrelation of different modes –linguistic, visual, spatial, auditory, and gestural– (Martínez-Carratalá et al., 2024). To do this, it is essential that these future teachers transform their roles from an ideal reader to a competent mediator (Díaz-Díaz et al., 2022) that understands multimodality and multiliteracies as spaces for inclusion, equity and connection (Watts-Taffe, 2022).

Ultimately, the silent picturebook emerges as an essential ally for the transmission of oral culture in university classrooms, particularly in the training of future teachers across all educational stages. Grounded in the development of multiliteracies and multimodality, it fosters strategies and skills that enable students to confidently engage with this type of format, activating their prior knowledge to decipher meanings that they will later extrapolate to their everyday experiences and future teaching practice. In doing so, they become competent mediators, creating safe and inclusive learning environments that promote the construction of a sustainable contemporary culture (Cejudo, 2016).

In the development of oral culture in university classrooms, literary conversation aligns with the ideas of Acosta et al. (2022) regarding the creation of formative environments that foster the construction of knowledge through dialogue and shared interpretation. These authors highlight the conception of literary conversation like a: “situación de enseñanza propicia para que los lectores construyan sentido, comuniquen, comenten, discutan, se sensibilicen; creen hipótesis y conjeturas, para demostrar la intención comunicativa del texto y para aprender a interpretar la vida, fin ineludible de la educación” (p. 115). This life interpretation, according to HRE approach and the (re)dignification of migration phenomena, must constitute an ethical and democratic space that promotes linguistic and literary growth (Linares, 2024 and Martínez, 2023).

Plus, these spaces nurture genuine listening practices that contribute to the development of essential communicative competencies, which are fundamental from early childhood education onwards. In line with the creation of these free, safe, and formative spaces to favour the development of critical thinking, Sonzini (2019) states that children have an innate critical ability by comparing, judging and questioning certain issues (p. 200). In this sense, these abilities must be enhanced in pre-service teachers training by using the benefits of literary conversation.

By the same token, literary conversation emerges as an inherent expression of oral culture and proves to be highly suitable when intertwined with picturebook format. Thus, although Amat i Castells (2023) point out that “la conversa literària es pot dur a terme a partir de la lectura d’obres de qualsevol gènere i tipus,” (p. 9), in this case, the selection of picturebooks is not accidental since according to Fittipaldi (2022) this format has several advantages when using with literary conversation: its capacity for condensation, brevity, complexity related to multiple layers of meaning, and freedom associated with surprise (p. 7).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

In order to unveil the hybrid and multimodal nature of graphic migration, we have carried out the methodology described below. First, we have conducted a search for bibliographic materials based on the examples of illustrated literature on migration

themes available in the collections of the Universitat de València. In this case, *Migrants* is accessible in Education Library, and it has been awarded all around the world with prizes such as the Llibreter Prize 2020 for the Best Illustrated Volume (Spain), the Banco del Libro de Venezuela Prize for the Best Visual Narrative 2020, among others.

Regarding the methodology used in the research, its approach is clearly qualitative as there is a thematic analysis based on pattern responses. The main methodological sections of the study are described below: sample participants, data collection instruments and procedure.

#### 4.1. Participants

The sample is totally composed of 125 participants. As it has been indicated in the introduction, one of the main innovations of this research is its interfaculty nature since two groups from different degrees at Universitat de València participated. On the one hand, a group of 52 students (48 female and 4 male) enrolled in the subject “Foreign Language Teachers: English” in the *Facultat de Formació del Professorat* took part in both the individual sessions with their classroom group and the final collaborative one. Regarding the main traits of this group, it can be highlighted that they are attending the first year of the Early Childhood Education Degree and they have to obtain a B1 English level according to MCER. Dealing with their origin, except two Erasmus students, the rest of the class come from Spain, mainly from the Comunitat Valenciana. On the other hand, a group of 73 students (60 female and 13 male) belonged to the mandatory module “American Literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries” which lasts one whole academic year, 12 credits ECTS and taught in the third year of the English Studies Degree, therefore enrolled students in this course should have achieved at least a C1 level of English.

#### 4.2. Data Collection Instruments

Regarding Data Collection Instruments, those are the following ones:

1. **Graphic Representations:** In order to conduct a preliminary assessment of the students’ perceptions on migration phenomenon, an initial group task was devised. This task involved the creation of a graphic representation related to migration, without offering additional guidance or specifications.
2. **Direct Observation:** This instrument was also employed during the debates and mini-assemblies held in the individual sessions of each group, as well as during the final debate session with both groups. Moreover, this instrument is relevant in the construction of the collaborative story based on the flourishing of a common oral culture using English and cultivated by using literary conversation method.

3. The collaborative story: Both groups wrote a story based on the silent picturebook shared in class.
4. Elaboration of didactic activities: In the final session, both groups design some activities to be implemented in the future or in the training programmes.
5. Focus Group: Two volunteer students from each group share final ideas on migration phenomenon and its didactic implications.

### 4.3. Procedure

1. The research team held a preliminary meeting to select the challenging topic to be addressed in the classroom sessions.

Based on a HRE Model for Transformative Action (Bajaj, 2011), this experience seeks for a future teachers' transformative and activist attitude in order to get a global understanding of the migration phenomenon where the acceptance of the difference and the respect of everybody rights are crucial (Tibbits and Kirschlaeger, 2010, p. 19). In this sense, challenging picturebooks with topics such as migration help to develop multimodal literary competences (Ommundsen et al., 2022) and constitute a cognitive challenge for readers (Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer, 2022). Moreover, Sciarba et al. (2021) highlight that these artistic objects engage readers in "the process of retelling, in humanizing ways, problematic discourses related to people who are systemically oppressed" (p. 412).

Rooted on these previous ideas, *Migrants* has been selected not only for being a powerful democratic example that offers an emotionally resonant and visually compelling way to engage prospective teachers with one of the most urgent humanitarian issues of our time, but also as a resource that contributes to the construction of political agency in children from early age (Balcázar, 2025, p. 38) through the magisterial visual narrative depiction of a dangerous and sorrowful journey of a diverse group of animals who travel together in search of a new home. Additionally, all the compendium of images enhances readers' critical interpretation.

2. Once the theme and format for its presentation were selected, a second meeting took place to organize individual sessions and develop common synergies. The main objective of this second meeting was to design the implementation of a series of activities around the collaborative and interpretive reading of the picturebook *Migrants* in relation to the global phenomenon of migration applied to the educational sphere. This mode of reading is undeniably linked to the methodology of literary conversation, which explores the dual identity of the participants in the study—as both students and prospective educators—and promotes the development of communicative competencies. These, in turn,

contribute to the revitalization of oral culture through mechanisms such as interpellation, critical reflection, and inquiry (Castedo, 2011).

3. Each researcher conducted the designed sessions (120 minutes each) in their classroom during their class time in the academic year 2024-2025, plus the final joint session at the end of the intervention.

A table presenting the sessions conducted in both groups and the final joint session can be found below (table 1).

**Table 1.** Sessions in both groups “Foreign Language Teachers: English” and “American literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries”

Title	Objectives	Contents
Session 1: (Re)discovering the phenomenon of migration	To assess students’ initial perceptions on migration phenomenon To foster work group and collaborative decision-making	Elaboration of a graphic expression on migration phenomenon using multimodal resources (visual materials and personal objects) Introduction to <i>Migrants</i> (Cover page and first mini-assembly)
Session 2: Developing critical and sensitive competences through the collaborative reading of <i>Migrants</i>	To develop a critical and sensitive awareness on migration phenomenon through a HRE model To foster collaborative oral culture through the elaboration of a story	Introduction to <i>Migrants</i> story using multimodal resources (video and photos) Reading aloud of <i>Migrants</i> (elaboration of the story in big group) Writing of a <i>Migrants</i> Story (small groups) Final Reflections
Final joint session	To share pre-service teachers experiences around migration and silent picturebooks To create a series of activities that promotes the development of a collaborative didactic perspective	Debate (literary conversation) with heterogeneous participants Design of didactic activities in heterogeneous groups

As it can be observed, the first session serves as an introduction and seeks to explore students' perceptions on the migration phenomenon. To this end, participants are asked to produce a visual representation, using "migration objects" –they were previously instructed to bring. Furthermore, students are introduced to the silent picturebook through the mini-assembly technique using challenging questions.

In the second session, Bland's strategies are used in order to engage students with the story. Bland (2022) outlines a "Deep Reading Framework" that consists of four interconnected stages designed to foster deep reading. These stages include: (1) Unpuzzle and Explore, (2) Activate and Investigate, (3) Critically Engage, and (4) Experiment with Creative Response (p. 26). In the first stage a short-animated video, titled *Home* by Save the Children, and some inspirational photos from the collection "Where Children Sleep" by Magnus Wennman are offered to students in order to awaken their interest and engagement with the topic.

In the second stage, all students activate their oral culture and develop their visual narrative and critical literacies using English to produce a story based on the images. Finally, in the third stage, in small groups they elaborate a creative response by writing the story.

**Figure 1.** *A girl sleeping.* Source: Magnus Wennman's photographs of Syrian children, "Where the Children Sleep"



**Figure 2.** *Children sleeping.* Source: Magnus Wennman's photographs of Syrian children, "Where the Children Sleep"



4. Finally, a group session was held with all participants with the aim of creating interfaculty relationships between future teachers from different educational stages. The main objective of this session was to share and reflect on the previous work on the migration phenomenon through collaborative reading and the construction of *Migrants* story. The session was planned in two parts: (1) the first focused on a collaborative discussion of students' initial perceptions and the changes that emerged after delving into *Migrants*, (2) the second was aimed at the development of didactic activities in heterogeneous groups, where students were required to choose the educational level and adapt the tasks accordingly.

5. Finally, a 20-minute focus group, with two volunteers from each group, was conducted, divided into two sections: (1) awareness of the migration phenomenon within the education field, (2) relevance of using silent picturebooks in the development of oral culture and visual literacy.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With regard to the dissemination of results, and based on the data collected through all the aforementioned instruments as well as the thematic analysis of students' responses to each of the proposed tasks, the following categories have been selected:

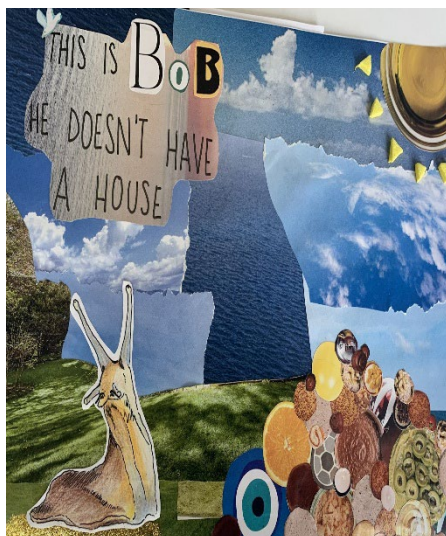
1. Development of a sensitive and critical consciousness on migration phenomenon applied to educational field through Human Rights Education approach: Through the first graphic expression exercise, it was observed that the notions of the migration phenomenon are similar across both groups. These are typically associated with the educational sphere, often depicted through representations of heterogeneous classrooms. It is also noteworthy that several groups illustrated the phenomenon using images of animals. All representations are generally positive —such as the discovery of a new country or culture— with the exception of one, which conveys the sadness of having to leave one's homeland.

At this point, it can be underlined the importance of studies such as that of Schachner et al. (2019), which highlight that fostering a positive climate of cultural diversity in the classroom has beneficial effects for all parties involved, as it helps to prevent discrimination and facilitates the management of the migration phenomenon. In this regard, these initial favorable perceptions among future teachers are essential, as they are the ones responsible for creating and fostering such an environment (Vinković and Hodonj, 2020).

**Figure 3.** *Positive representation of Migration.* Source: Students' elaboration



**Figure 4.** *Negative representation of Migration.* Source: Students' elaboration



Therefore, the starting point was already favorable for fostering critical awareness and sensitivity among the participants in the sample. In fact, during direct observation of the debates and mini-assemblies held in both groups, based on literary conversation methodology, several positive comments were made, such as: "As future teachers, we must be especially sensitive to this issue because nowadays new children from other cultures are arriving in classrooms almost daily" (Student from "Foreign Language Teachers: English"); and "I believe that migration is a positive factor for attracting talent from abroad" (Student from "American literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries"). It is also worth noting that the comments became more empathetic and insightful following the viewing of the animated short film and the connection between the photographs by Magnus Wennman and the work *Migrants*. Some contributions went even further, linking the migration phenomenon to the broader themes of human rights and democracy, especially in the focus group, where the four volunteers affirmed that an intercultural understanding of migration provides them with strategies to achieve a democratization of the classroom by fostering the recognition and dignification of minorities' rights (Lenzi et al., 2014).

2. Understanding the didactic and pedagogical relevance of silent picturebooks in the activation of the oral culture, literary conversation and the development of visual literacy

The results related to this category are also highly positive, as both the individual mini-assemblies and the final debate helped future teachers to recognize the effectiveness and potential of this type of format. Among the most noteworthy

comments were: “This type of picturebook can be used at any educational level” (Student from “Foreign Language Teachers: English”) or “It is a very useful tool for addressing complex topics in the classroom (Student from “Foreign Language Teachers: English”) and “It helps to reduce comprehension difficulties in English, as students understand it better with the support of the images” (Student from “American literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries”). All these findings are related to the suitability of using the picturebook format through literary conversation to address complex topics, since, as Zabka (2015) points out, this type of methodology facilitates participation in discourse on moral issues (p. 169). Moreover, the imbrication between picturebooks and literary conversation facilitates an experience of socialization and the generation of collective responses (Acosta and Jurado, 2022, p. 869), apart from the development of critical thinking (Secanella, 2024).

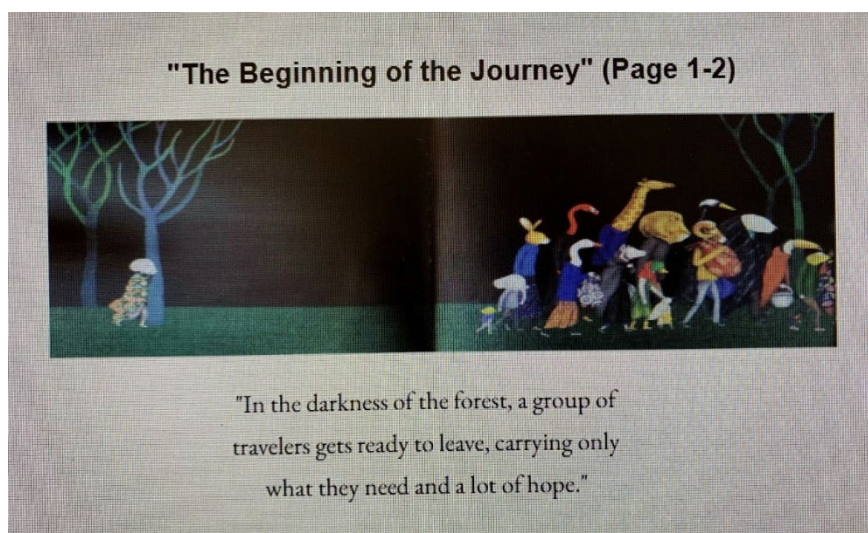
Similarly, through the oral story construction task, students incorporated their personal backgrounds, which were part of their own oral culture, into the collaborative creation of a text on migration. In this context, their individual perceptions also became evident and they were able to activate and develop their critical visual literacy defined by Murphy (2024) as “an interconnected set of practices, habits, and values for participating in visual culture that can be developed through critical, ethical, reflective, and creative engagement with visual media” (p. vii). These oral contributions indicated that the participants paid close attention to essential aspects of the silent picturebook, such as composition, color, and the positioning of characters. At this point, it is important to emphasize the essential role of the teacher’s guidance, which “alerts” participants to activate their prior knowledge and construct the narrative, thereby enabling the achievement of optimal and reflective outcomes (Acosta and Jurado, 2022, p. 871).

This visual literacy becomes critical when other key elements are activated, such as social justice and an understanding of how power relations operate—both of which are essential components for an intercultural understanding of the migration phenomenon. Definitively, “critical visual literacy is an acknowledgement that texts work to position us, and that this happens below the level of consciousness. What critical visual literacy does is provide strategies for making these workings conscious” (Newfield, 2011, p. 92).

As it can be observed in these examples below, from the task of writing the text of *Migrants*, the first one (figure 5) corresponds to the first page of the story elaborated by a group from the subject “Foreign Language Teachers: English” and the second one (figure 6) belongs to a group from the subject “American literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries”, students have activated critical visual literacy competence in order to imbricate migration phenomenon with a critical readiness of the images. It is remarkable that in the two figures positive feelings like hope are present both in the beginning and in the end of the story. Indeed, this was one of the main topics for reflection in the focus group and the conclusion drawn is that the future students of

the 21<sup>st</sup> century generally perceive migration as a positive and enriching phenomenon, largely due to recent university policies that promote the inclusion of such topics within academic curricula, especially in literature and didactic subjects.

**Figure 5.** *The first page of the story.* Source: Students' elaboration ("Foreign Language Teachers: English")

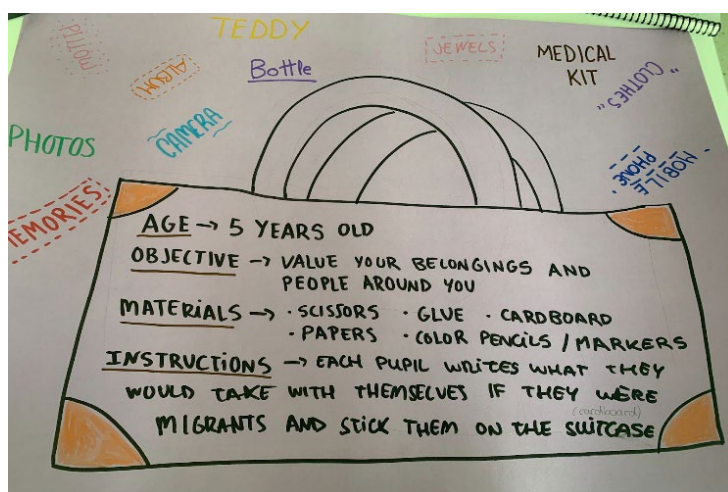


**Figure 6.** *The last page of the story.* Source: Students' elaboration ("American Literature II: from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries")

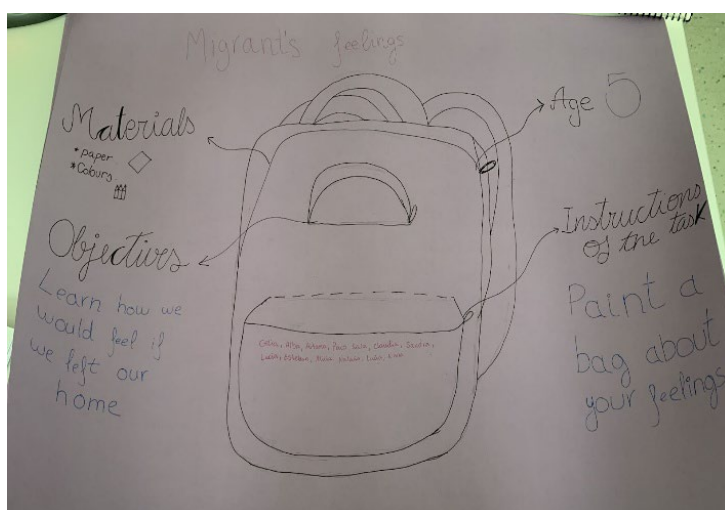


Finally, from an educational perspective, during the final session, the students from both degrees recognized the didactic and pedagogical potential of the picturebook as a tool for designing an activity. Although they were allowed to choose any educational stage, it is worth emphasizing that all groups selected the 5-year-old preschool level, and in many cases, they incorporated the symbolism of the suitcase into their proposed activities, as a key element of the migratory phenomenon, which resonates with all types of students, regardless of age, gender, origin, religion, or other background characteristics.

**Figure 7.** A task for 5-year-old students. Source: Students' elaboration



**Figure 8.** A task for 5-year-old students. Source: Students' elaboration



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Through this interfaculty classroom experience based on *Migrants*, we have seen how illustrated literature becomes an agent that contributes to shaping our mental and experiential realities. From the language and literature didactics paradigm, graphic migration does so from the fictional perspective, which is almost always based on the reality of certain life trajectories and challenging situations.

As the migration phenomena is an encounter —or disconnect— between cultures, between worldviews, conflicting and disparate routines, between people who leave their sociocultural bubble to come into contact with others, which usually entails a conflict that will be resolved in a more or less integrative, respectful, and enriching way, our innovative education intervention based on the Human Rights approach and literary conversation methodology wills to develop a sensitive and critical consciousness on undergraduate students simultaneously in two faculties at the Universitat de València with a final joint session with the participation of all the students of the sample.

By understanding the didactic and pedagogical relevance of graphic migration, and more specifically the silent picturebook *Migrants* (2019) by Issa Watanabe, we refer to stories that relate to the movement of people in and out of political borders, which entail a local displacement and, therefore, also a vital one, done via the activation of the oral culture, literary conversation and the development of visual literacy. In other words, we have been able to verify through the analyzed work, graphic migration becomes an opportunity to overcome individual, family, or social traumas generated by migratory experiences, and it even helps and facilitates future teachers the development of a critical and responsible information literacy (Calvo, 2022), that emerges from the double idiosyncrasy of literary conversation as individual and collective experience (Chambers, 2007).

Among the limitations of this study, it should be noted that the sample is not particularly large, as it involves only two groups from two different subjects at different faculties. Therefore, this project comes to light as the starting point of a more ambitious initiative that could include a larger number of students, particularly those with academic profiles directly or indirectly related to the field of education. Nevertheless, it could also be of interest to extend the scope to other branches of the social sciences, such as law or political science, where graphic literature currently has, at least for the time being, a limited presence.

Thus, this work seeks to contribute to the consolidation of graphic migration as a field of study where the power of image and word intertwines with emotional and political burden associated with HRE, guiding future teachers in a global understanding of migratory phenomena through critical awareness facilitated by the advantages of literary conversation in the activation of oral culture and the development of English-speaking skills.

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