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Editorial: Intercultural Learning and Critical Literacy – There is No Single Story

Welcome to the new issue of the *CLELEjournal* – with this issue the journal is now five years old.

The *CLELEjournal* has from the outset been highly international, which is hardly surprising considering the global reach of ELT. Since the first issue in May 2013, the *CLELEjournal* has published articles and book reviews from a score of different countries across Europe, Asia, North America and Australia – take a look at <http://clelejournal.org/news/> for a complete list of articles and reviews published in the journal from May 2013 to November 2017.

As the local becomes ever more diverse and the global becomes ever more local, the role of language learning in potentially supporting our ability to change perspective becomes ever more urgent. English is a lingua franca that does not belong to any national culture, but to the huge majority of cultures worldwide where English now plays a role, thus ELT in school settings seems to carry a particular responsibility for intercultural competence. At the same time, all texts are ideology-laden – textbooks will have an ideological impact on our students (Gray, 2016, p. 99) and similarly all stories are ideological narratives, as many articles in the *CLELEjournal* have attested, so that exercising intercultural understanding and empathy must go hand in hand with critical literacy.

In order to avoid an ethnocentric perspective and isolationism (an affliction to which English-speaking countries – often where the majority is monolingual – seem increasingly prone), it is important to extend the range of voices and experiences in the classroom. One way is through discussion of literature from different cultural contexts: ‘Books are sometimes the only place where readers may meet people who are not like themselves, who offer alternative worldviews’ (Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014, p. 29). However literary canons as well as textbooks must be examined critically – who are the stakeholders and does one particular perspective predominate? Nearly thirty years ago Clarke and Clarke (1990, p. 36) maintained, ‘it is in TESOL textbooks published in the west for the world market that we find a major instrument for cultural transmission and a source of

concern for the effect which stereotyped images may have'. We have hopefully moved on a little since then, for intercultural learning has since become a major learning goal in English language education in many school settings (at least according to the curriculum). However critical literacy – examining the privileging of dominant voices and the consequent devaluation of cultural identities in textbooks in the classroom, as well as ideological narratives in multimodal texts (such as movies and texts on the Web) that surround us outside the classroom – is not yet a paradigm in ELT.

In this vein the first article in this issue, Rebekah Mey Degener's 'Lacking Liberation in Language: African American Language in the Animated Film *The Secret Life of Pets*' looks at choices made for the voicing of different characters in a recent popular children's film. The study argues that African American English and actors of colour are employed in this and other animated films to mark characters as outsiders or deviant and of lower socio-economic status. This seems particularly insidious as *The Secret Life of Pets* is an animated film and the characters are animals of no particular human-related colour! Thus children listening to the voices and enjoying the film in the classroom or out of school will scarcely be aware how their attitudes towards African Americans are being influenced, and the legitimacy of African American English is being undermined, unless critical literacy is exercised.

The next article, Olja Milosevic's '*The Tiger's Wife* – Promoting Intercultural Understanding', focuses on developing intercultural competence amongst advanced 17- to 18-year-old students of English, a mixed group of Serbian and international students. The author explains how *The Tiger's Wife* captures the mindset of people of the Balkans against the background of the recent wars, and thus the sharing of views from the young Serbians' perspective was made possible, despite the intense emotion involved. At the same time, the international students were motivated by the narrative to understand recent events through the eyes of their peers.

The issue continues on the theme of cultural identity with Nayr Ibrahim's review of *Children's Literature in Multilingual Classrooms: From Multiliteracy to Multimodality* (ed. Hélot, Sneddon & Daly, 2014). Ibrahim highlights how the book champions

integrating heritage languages into literacy instruction in the majority language, so that the children's home language does not suffer as they acquire the language of schooling.

The Recommended Venues featured in this issue have been discovered in Japan by Christiane Lütge: *The International Library of Children's Literature, Tokyo* and *The Centre for International Children's Literature, Osaka*. The Recommended Reads, contributed by Annett Kaminski, Maria Valeije, Anneta Sadowska-Martyka and Susanne Reichl, feature children's literary texts that are jewels for you to discover – or rediscover.

As always, we wish to thank our contributors and all who have been instrumental in creating this issue.

Happy reading,

Janice Bland and Sandie Mourão

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