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Children's Literature in Multilingual Classrooms: From Multiliteracy to Multimodality

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Reviewer

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Developing literacy in classrooms around the world today is still an exercise in teaching children the language of schooling – the national or majority language – to the detriment of all of their other languages. In Cummins' words, quoted in Chapter 3 of this publication, 'we are faced with the bizarre scenario of schools successfully transforming fluent speakers of foreign languages into monolingual speakers' (Cummins, 2005, p. 586). Hence, the importance of this book, as it explores a variety of contexts where multiple languages are welcomed into the mainstream classroom. Not only do these different projects present opportunities for bi-literacy – literacy across languages – development, but they also make visible and validate children's multilingual repertoires, they empower children and their families to engage in new sociocultural contexts and they allow for identity affirmation. Children's identities as multilingual speakers learning the language of schooling and as confident and competent learners are recognised and celebrated.

Cummins, in his forward, identifies three theoretical claims that underlie the instructional practices described in this publication: acknowledging children's full language repertoire supports cross-linguistic transfer and understanding about language; literacy engagement promotes literacy attainment; identity affirmation supports academic success. I would add a fourth, pedagogical claim, the relevance of bringing to the fore the key role of children's literature as classroom-based literacy practice. One of the contributors, Heather Lotherington, states 'children's literature is a crucial route to literacy development' (p. 87). Besides building linguistic bridges, every chapter offers an opportunity to develop knowledge of children's literature from around the world, the cultural contexts in which these stories are embedded and invites the children's home

cultures and families to participate. Teachers are a key element in these stories of translingual practice. Raymonde Sneddon considers that 'teachers have become more knowledgeable about the cognitive and educational benefits of bilingualism' (p. 123); however, I believe more training is needed for this knowledge to be translated into effective classroom practice in developing an active approach to integrating children's literacies across their languages.

Besides the focus on developing literacy in multiple languages, another theme that runs through the book is multimodality. Multimodal communication integrates the word with image, sound, videos and other forms of animation as well as spatial and virtual elements. Multimodality and multiliteracies intertwine to give children the best possible means of expressing themselves, acknowledging children's voices and affirming their identities. In the various case studies in this book children encounter and create texts in a variety of modes; for example, in Chapter 5, Lotherington describes a project where children rewrote traditional stories in the languages of schooling, English and French, and in their respective heritage languages, using digital media with pictures, voice-overs, sound and animation. These texts, which accommodate 'the interplay of different semiotic modes and recognise the complexity of multimodal narrative meaning' (Nørgaard, 2010, p. 115), become children's 'identity texts' (Cummins and Early, 2011).

Children's Literature in Multilingual Classrooms: From Multiliteracy to Multimodality brings together nine chapters, divided into three parts that explore multiliteracy development in multilingual classrooms around the world: Catalonia, New Zealand, Canada, the UK, Finland and Austria. These different pedagogical initiatives include the teachers, the parents and the children. Part One, focusing on translation and translanguaging, embeds translation in multilingual practice and highlights the important role of translators and their choices in minority language situations. Maria Gonzáles Davies describes the historical and ideological journey of the translation of children's literature and its purpose in Catalonia in the twentieth century. By comparing two Catalan translations of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* the author highlights two different approaches to translation that reflect different agendas: making the novel more accessible to the target audience and thus, contributing to the revival of Catalan; or keeping the text closer to the source language and culture. Caterina Sugranyes Ernest and Maria Gonzáles Davies report on another project from Catalonia that uses a plurilingual approach to

encourage translating heritage languages for the following reasons: it recognises the existence of heritage languages in mainstream schools and values these languages; and promotes heritage languages to the same level as status languages, such as English or the languages of schooling (Spanish and Catalan). Besides increased motivation for language learning and heightened metalinguistic awareness, the visibility of these languages created legitimate spaces for language use and confidence building. In Chapter 2, Nicola Daley explores the use of Māori loanwords in children's literature and the choices authors and translators make of words for cultural reasons, for semantic or fluency purposes as well as for achieving educational objectives. Most importantly, these loanwords provide a 'window between worlds' (p. 41) and 'contribute to the growth of a distinctive New Zealand linguistic identity' (p. 44).

Part Two explores new pedagogies of multiliteracy and includes a focus on strategies that support metalinguistic awareness, cross-lingual practice and comparing languages from a structural perspective, so a focus on form as well as content. Besides these linguistic objectives, there is also a fundamental teacher development aspect, which creates collaborative and creative partnerships that are beneficial for the children, their families and the school. Roy Lyster's chapter describes a teacher development project that encourages French and English teachers to develop biliteracy by co-designing tasks based on picturebooks. Besides the collaborative benefits for the teachers, this project highlights the benefits of children's literature for developing language and content. Heather Lotherington's project includes collaboration between schoolteachers, researchers as well as teaching assistants and parents, who helped with translations. The photographs of children's final outcomes and of parents working with their children makes the project come alive for the reader. In the last chapter in Part Two, Judith Oller focuses on adult literacy education and promotes educational continuities between home and school among immigrant African groups by developing mothers' L1 and L2 literacy practices. They created a bilingual heritage language-Catalan storybook of ten African tales that was then published and distributed to the local libraries and schools. This project not only empowered these immigrant mothers by gaining confidence in helping their children in the Catalan school system, but also helped them integrate a new sociocultural context and contribute to a more inclusive society. At the end of the chapter, the author offers some advice on how teachers could use the bilingual stories in the classroom.

Part Three has a specific focus on children writing, illustrating and publishing their own stories – ‘children as authors’, as mentioned by Hélot in her Introduction (p. 13). The children make decisions about what to include, how to write the books and where to find the information they require. Raymonde Sneddon’s chapter begins with a quote from one of the children in the project who wrote stories in English and Albanian with a fellow Albanian-speaking classmate. The child’s quote highlights her sense of pride and her imagination and creativity as she ‘made it up in English and Albanian’ (p. 121). In the second case study, teachers help a group of 4-6 year old francophone children to write an animal tale, where children were contributing ideas about the characters, the plot and even full sentences to the dialogue. As the children negotiated meaning across languages, they enhanced their vocabulary and learned about the structural elements of both languages. The benefits of translation for enhancing bilingual learners’ linguistic awareness are highlighted again in this chapter, with Malakoff and Hakuta (1991, p. 146) describing translation as the ‘metalinguistic skill par excellence’. The last two chapters describe The ‘Little Books’ project in Finland and Austria based on the theoretical concept of participatory literacy. In Chapter 8, Anne Pitkänen-Huhta and Sari Pietikäinen describe how children wrote their stories in Sámi, the classroom language, and then translated them into the language of their choice. This approach not only valued the children’s indigenous languages and celebrated their literacy across languages, but the book-creating process, which included a book launch, photographs of the child authors on the back cover, and making these books available in the public domain, endorsed children’s agency and creativity. The ‘Little Books’ project in Austria, described by Christian Schreger and Stefan Pernes, had children produce, collaboratively or individually, a range of multilingual and multimodal books in different genres, including fiction and non-fiction. In the end, 500 volumes were printed and the books made their way outside of the classroom, into the media, having won a number of prizes.

The focus of this book is specifically on children’s literature as a medium for developing literacy across languages in school. The focus on children’s written and oral literature from different cultures serves as a springboard for the various multiliteracy projects in this publication. Even though the aim of the book is opening up our monolingual classrooms to multilingual pedagogies, the reader may benefit from the section on the theoretical perspectives of children’s literature, the value of picturebooks

from a narrative and even the semiotic perspective and the pedagogical implications of literature as literacy development.

Ultimately, *Children's Literature in Multilingual Classrooms: From Multiliteracy to Multimodality* is about creating multilingual and multimodal identity texts. Each project breaks down linguistic and cultural borders and encourages participation, inclusion and deeper cultural understanding through a multiliteracies approach. It exploits and enhances multilingual children's cognitive advantage and cross-lingual ability by integrating multimodality, multilinguality and a multiliteracies pedagogy. This book is an excellent resource for teachers and teacher trainers who are looking for ideas for multilingual classrooms in majority language situations and for integrating heritage languages into literacy instruction. Researchers, interested in plurilingual approaches to literacy development, will be inspired by these projects and go on to initiate and diffuse similar studies in different contexts.

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The reviewer

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