
Janice Bland (Ed.)

Using Literature in English Language Education. Challenging Reading for 8-18 Year Olds

London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 307 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-3500-3425-9

Reviewer

Maria Eisenmann

This collection of chapters maintains the importance of using literature in the language classroom and provides comprehensive, in-depth and state-of-the-art insights to literature learning in ELT contexts, with equal attention to both theoretical and practical concerns. The editor pursues the ambitious aim to show that ‘literary texts afford wide educational benefits in addition to language benefits, for example intercultural understanding, empathy, multiple literacies, an understanding of the connectedness of the world and global issues, tolerance, cognitive and affective gains and self-reliance’ (p. 1). Indeed, this volume includes contributions focusing on ‘deep reading for deep learning in ELT’ (p. 6) for learners of different ages and ability groups, using a wide range of literary genres and formats, including new topics for literature learning alongside the tried and tested.

Most of the contributions follow the structure of theoretical assumptions and aims of literary education, methodological options, and illuminating examples in order to gain deep reading skills, i.e. a deep understanding of a text as well as opportunities for submerging into the text, triggering creative processes. Other issues present in the volume are teaching literary literacy, visual literacy, creative writing, intercultural learning, global education and critical pedagogy. Leading scholars from around the world explore present-day challenges for literature and language learning in the light of current theoretical debates and a balance is sought between theoretical input and practical work in the classroom. From wordless picturebooks to graphic novels, story apps, film and drama, as well as speculative fiction, recent research on teaching

literature in ELT settings combines with cognitive criticism in the field of children's, young adult and adult literature. Framed by a convincing and profound foreword by Peter Hunt and a very substantiated afterword with 'thoughts on the way ahead' (p. 269) by Geoff Hall, the volume is organized into three distinct sections – Part One: Multimodal Challenges; Part Two: Provocative and Compelling; Part Three: Embracing the Challenges.

Throughout the first part, a wide range of multimodal texts are discussed and the importance of understanding the interplay of pictorial and verbal elements is emphasized. Above that, the participatory nature of teaching with multimodal texts and their suitability also for young readers is clearly evident. The first contribution by Marek Oziewicz launches the academic discussion on theories and approaches to graphic novels, comics, picturebooks and comic strips, striving to throw light on definitions, terminological clarity and on how the different formats work. Brian Selznick's texts *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, *Wonderstruck* and *The Marvels* are examined in order to help students realize the complex procedures of being absorbed by storytelling techniques. This is followed by Janice Bland's chapter on creativity in ELT, which examines examples from work around the playscript for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, a two-part stage play based on an original story by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany and Jack Thorne. Bland also integrates the screenplay to the fantasy film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a spin-off and prequel to the *Harry Potter* film series, to teach students dramatic approaches such as scripting, voicing characters' thoughts and making use of multiple modes of communication. Both texts have been chosen in order to enhance students' critical literacy and to teach them creative writing.

The next two comprehensive chapters make a powerful case and provide a good insight into literacy and language learning with wordless picturebooks. Evelyn Arizpe and Sadie Ryan show how challenging wordless picturebooks can be in multilingual educational contexts. Their studies with students show the significant impact of using David Wiesner's *Mr Wuffles!* and *Flotsam*, which both provide a space for student reflections on their learning process, by inspiring them to co-authoring and creative writing as well as teaching them meta-cognitive strategies. Gail Ellis discusses how teachers can develop multiple literacies with Bob Staake's wordless picturebook

Bluebird in elementary ELT. The author states that this can be achieved holistically by using students' words and bringing their own world views into the classroom, while teachers provide a secure, stimulating space for reflection and discussion to allow for the development of visual, linguistic and intercultural competencies.

The next contribution is set in elementary teaching, focusing on the significant role story apps can play in literacy development. In their qualitative research study, Sonja Brunsmeier and Annika Kolb show how the features of story apps significantly influence the reading process and help elementary language learners to understand the stories. They describe the challenge of interactivity as well as the potential for fostering autonomous reading provided by story apps, and emphasize the importance of teacher mediation for fruitful educational interaction. In the next chapter, Michael Prusse describes criss-crossing different narrative formats by transmedial reading, a process where integral elements of a text get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified learning experience. The author shows this critical cultural literacy approach using Tim Winton's *Lockie Leonard* book trilogy and TV series. He explains how a transmedial approach can help students to understand adaptation as a creative cultural practice, and to deepen their reading of a book, a painting, a TV series, and thus to gain an insight into modern and historical Australian culture.

The second part, which provides a close look at a variety of different genres focusing on topics such as migration, disability, gender and environmental issues, is opened by Werner Delanoy, who knowledgeably and proficiently outlines literature in language education and the closely interrelated challenges for theory building. He argues that multiperspectivism is needed for global education and rightly suggests dialogue as an essential educational approach. Through the example of Beverley Naidoo's short story collection *Out of Bounds* and a multimodal literature project design for secondary level, he recommends a methodology of intertextuality where the text is read, connected and discussed in the context of other texts. In the following contribution, Johanna Marks and Thorsten Merse challenge content, canon and methodology by exploring love-themed fiction in the context of diversity in the ELT classroom. They suggest non-canonical texts of cultural otherness such as John Green's

novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, which includes a focus on disability and disease, and David Levithan's short story *Princes*, which is set in an LGBTQ context. In her chapter on Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Janice Bland concentrates on the second novel, *Catching Fire*, and clearly explains the importance of teaching dystopian fiction and the need to read and discuss such contemporary literature in today's 21st century context. Inspiringly, she shows how contemporary dystopian fiction can foster learning opportunities around social responsibility and enter the discourse on environmental, ecological issues.

In the next contribution, Jürgen Wehrmann elicits how thought experiments can be conducted on the basis of plot elements with advanced ELT students while reading Ursula Le Guin's science-fiction short story 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'. He then suggests further short science-fiction narratives which allow utopian thinking and thus foster discussions around dilemmas, and moral and political judgements. Speculative fiction is the topic of Jean Webb's chapter, where she argues that in view of the planetary threat posed by human-caused ecological damage and environmental destruction, global and ecological education is becoming increasingly important. All her text samples deal with an imagined future where the environmental threat has caused mass exodus after a disaster, relating this to how young survivors have to face what happens next, challenging students to grapple with the fictional world and inviting critical thinking and active engagement with the scenarios portrayed. Tzina Kalogirou's chapter takes us to a very different subject by describing a project where students in Greece compare Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Michael Lesslie's contemporary adaptation *Prince of Denmark*, a dramatic prelude to Shakespeare's tragedy, which displays artistic complexity, responds to contemporary problems and gives insights into the protagonists' inner self. Dealing with both texts in ELT allows students to gain interpretative and intertextual competencies as well as negotiating reading in order to arrive at different, even contradictory perspectives.

The third and final part is twofold and completes the volume with an empirical study as well as Geoff Hall's afterword. Sam Duncan and Amos Paran present their highly interesting empirical research study which strives to find out how literature is used in the ELT classroom for advanced secondary and higher-level students. The

neatly designed study is based on teacher interviews, which explores the ways in which teachers negotiate the challenges of reading literature, that is choose and use literary texts, and their opinions about the possible impact on students' language learning. The study soundly evidences that the choice of an appropriate text to suit the learner group is a very complex venture, which has to be learned and is thus a desideratum in current teacher education. The very last part of the book (pp. 277-300) comprises a very helpful annotated bibliography by Janice Bland on literary texts recommended for children and young adults in ELT, structured in ten categories, from story apps to young adult fiction.

In sum, the book is a collection of very convincing and refreshing approaches. All the contributions aim to facilitate access to and to provide in-depth information on relevant issues in using literature in today's ELT classrooms. The comprehensive and well-presented volume is a worthy contribution to theory as well as methodology and offers many innovative teaching methods, which teachers and lecturers may well want to try out in class. Moreover, it provides university students and career starters with numerous suggestions for all school types and is also applicable to university courses.

Maria Eisenmann holds the Chair for Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Julius-Maximilians-University of Würzburg, Germany. She has published widely in the field of teaching literature and literary literacy. Most recently, she has co-edited *Teaching Multimodality and Multiliteracy. Theme Issue of Anglistik 1* (2018) and *Queer Beats. Gender and Literature in the EFL Classroom* (2018).