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Editorial: Extensive Reading and Deep Reading in ELT

Janice Bland

Welcome to the twelfth issue of *Children's Literature in English Language Education*!

The articles in this issue are all about getting our students reading –

What do we read with our students in English language education? Whose stories should we read about? Why should we read literary texts in ELT? These are all important questions, and there are many valid answers. There have been new demands and questions recently regarding the teaching of English literature, particularly for an opening of the canon towards new literatures. Riki Thompson and Matthew McInay argue in their paper in this issue that continually evolving education requirements can be met with the integration of non-traditional texts to reinvigorate curricula and engage readers, while also supporting language learners. Leaving behind the traditional canon in no way means we should sacrifice educational value. Referring to the discussion of a canon in the global literary world, Peter Hunt determines that choices by literary critics have been ‘riddled with value judgements and appeals to canonicity, as if it were quite natural’ (2014, p. 10). However, far from natural, a canon is usually determined for reasons that have little to do with educational value, and may not be as attached to literary value as at first appears, but rather cultural habit, ease and familiarity, and, very often, conformity to a recognizable model.

At secondary school, nonetheless, a very narrow canon often still reigns for more advanced students. And the young learners in ELT mostly receive no literary education in English at all, as Elisabeth Bruckmaier explains in her article in this issue. Yet, since the cultural turn in the last decades of the twentieth century, in academia at least, the understanding of literature has been re-conceptualized to become broader and pluralistic – the study of a wide variety of texts. Children's literature can be very experimental. Picturebooks, for example, often seem to break each new mould as soon as it is created; and children enjoying innovative picturebooks characteristically respond with a lack of prejudice and tolerance of ambiguity. In

both literacy education generally, and ELT, attention has gradually shifted from the concept of a fixed literary product to the interactive process of reception: ‘Analysis has been extended to all texts as cultural products, with the notion of culture seen as increasingly dynamic and co-constructed interactively, as an emergent and specifically linguistic process rather than as a completed product’ (Carter 2015, p. 316).

However, the majority of teachers may still be largely unaware of the huge choice of literary texts that can work in ELT school settings, and often outside of any particular canon of literature (for children or for adults). Which genres – horror, life stories, fantasy, science fiction, dystopias, refugee literature, love stories? There is so much choice. Or which format – graphic novels, chapter books, young adult fiction, picturebooks, verse novels, screenplays and so forth? All of these decisions strongly effect the reading experience, as well as language learning, intercultural understanding and opportunities for visual and critical literacy; and the papers in this issue of *Children’s Literature in English Language Education* illustrate how very important the right choice of literary text is.

What must be avoided is a mechanistic or instrumental approach to reading, for example when the language learners’ pleasure in a compelling read is disrupted by comprehension questions, vocabulary-list learning and even shallow testing. An ideal would be a happy balance between children’s free choice of reading, called extensive reading (Maley 2009) or free voluntary reading (Krashen 2004), and deep reading. Deep reading goes beyond the reading comprehension questions associated with intensive reading in ELT. Deep reading encompasses cognitively demanding contemplative processes and critical deliberation on word choices and pictures. In the classroom, deep reading leads to talking around texts, negotiation of insights and sharing of understandings (Bland 2018).

For extensive reading to be made possible, access to a well-stocked library is of central importance. Deep reading on the other hand requires a teacher who can expertly select the right book for an entire class of differently sophisticated readers and language learners at just the right time. Although these appear to be insurmountable pre-conditions, researchers argue that a

balance of extensive reading and deep reading is more cost-effective than the expensive coursebooks and activity books that are purchased in many countries year in and year out. And reading brings invaluable additional benefits besides, such as intellectual, emotional, ethical and social development. Consequently, an understanding of the benefits of both extensive reading and deep reading should accompany all pedagogical and financial decisions on teaching English in language education.

The first three papers in this issue are reports on action research. Working with Allen Say's superb picturebook *Tea with Milk* (2009), Eun Young Yeom illustrates in her paper how she guided her eighth and ninth graders in South Korea to 'generate their own voices, which were heterogeneous due to their different personal experiences'. Yeom found that the carefully selected picturebook was able to provide the language learners 'with a safe haven to experience other cultures and ideas that they had not considered before'.

Elisabeth Bruckmaier, in her article *The Wildest Lessons Ever!*, clearly illustrates with her project that 'the first and foremost aim of the students is to understand and consume a story, not to acquire vocabulary and grammar'. With her 5th grade students, Bruckmaier read a graded reader (sometimes known as *language learner literature*): Hamida Aziz's *The Wildest Party Ever!* The author documents the sense of achievement and motivation her students experienced, and her research indicates the universal approval of the students for the project of reading a book for several weeks as an alternative to the coursebook. As Bruckmaier writes in her paper: 'Teachers should avoid putting literature on a pedestal, as this could lead to a marginalization of literature rather than underscoring its significance', and her language learners certainly accepted the graded reader as an exciting and compelling read.

In the next paper, Luciana Cabral Pereira, Flávia Vieira and Aurora Teófilo describe a project whose 'primary focus was on expressive reading and dramatization, which are seldom explored in English classes'. The authors found that expressive reading promotes children's interest in stories in English. The project also palpably demonstrated that the dramatization of

stories stimulated the children's further interest in reading and helped develop their language skills.

In the fourth paper, Riki Thompson and Matthew McIlroy discuss anxieties often reported in the media about changing reading habits and literacy. They consider that the goal of literature classes is to use all texts for the opportunities of teaching moments. Thompson and McIlroy identify the main problem as lack of adequate access to reading materials, which is a huge disadvantage while school libraries with a certified librarian scarcely exist anywhere, except in fee-paying schools.

Our Recommended Venue for this issue has been contributed by Gail Ellis. She describes the innovative *Drawing Words* Exhibition, which is curated by Lauren Child, currently the UK's Children's Laureate. Our Recommended Reads are a tribute to the master picturebook artist John Burningham (1936–2019). His work has been an inspiration to children, teachers and picturebook scholars for more than half a century. Four of his books are introduced on these pages, thanks to Gail Ellis, Anneta Sadowska, Tatia Gruenbaum and Sandie Mourão.

As always, many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue. And most particularly, special thanks to Sandie. Dr Sandie Mourão, who has been my companion every step of the way of the first six years of *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, is stepping down as co-editor following this issue. She is now joining our invaluable team of peer reviewers on the Editorial Review Board. Huge thanks to Sandie – her expertise and enthusiasm have been and will remain of central importance to the *CLELEjournal*.

Happy reading,

Janice Bland

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