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Editorial: The Journey

Welcome to another issue of the *CLELEjournal*!

Even though articles on the picturebook in language education have appeared in almost all issues of the *CLELEjournal*, this particular issue has a special focus as it was prompted by a symposium held at the 50th IATEFL Annual Conference and Exhibition, in Birmingham in April 2016. The symposium, ‘Realbooks to picturebooks: thirty years of illustrated literature in ELT’, aimed at disseminating the expanding potential of the picturebook and recognizing its place in the history of foreign language education in English, in particular in the education of young learners. This editorial thus takes the opportunity to outline a brief history of the picturebook in education with a view to documenting some of what we consider to be major milestones. It serves both as an introduction to the content of this issue and as a record of a journey that began with the communicative language teaching approach in the 1970s.

In relation to the teaching of foreign languages in compulsory education, picturebooks have been referred to for over four decades (Ghosn, 2013b), despite Anna Birketveit identifying them as a ‘largely an undiscovered treasure trove’ (2013, p. 17). They have been given such labels as ‘authentic storybooks’ (e.g. Ellis & Brewster, 1991/2002/2014; Ghosn, 2013b) and ‘real books’ (e.g. Dunn, 1997; Machura, 1991; Mourão, 2003). The early references to a ‘real book approach’ (Dunn, 1997; Parker & Parker, 1991) using authentic, original texts in the second language (L2) classroom harks back to the debate around real books as opposed to graded reading schemes for teaching reading in first language (L1) education in the 1980s (e.g. Waterland, 1988). Indeed, the inclusion of the picturebook in the English language classroom is associated with a desire to embrace authentic texts (Enever & Schmid-Shönbein, 2006) – for picturebooks offer an alternative to the unimaginative texts of coursebooks and move away from what Smiljana Narančić Kovač (2005, p. 65) refers to as the ‘disinfected’ language of graded readers.

For practitioners and scholars who use or research the picturebook in English language education, the early work of Gail Ellis and Jean Brewster is highly relevant. Their seminal resource publication *The Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers* (1991) became *Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers* when it was revised in 2002 and subsequently further revised and published online by the British

Council in 2014. Their practical, hands-on approach to using stories and picturebooks, supported by an expansive list of reasons for doing so, and lengthened in later editions, is well cited. Their systematic criteria for selecting stories includes reference to linguistic, psychological, cognitive, sociological and cultural aspects of the picturebook, demonstrating that, if wisely selected, picturebooks can and should support the development of the whole child in a language-learning context. Many of the titles in the first edition remain firm favourites with pre-primary and primary English teachers, e.g. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *Meg and Mog* by Helen Nicoll and Jan Pieńkowski and *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes* by Eve Sutton and Lynley Dodd.

Opal Dunn, another educator associated with the picturebook in English language education, began *Real Book News* in 1997 'for adults helping children learn English as a foreign or additional language'.¹ Her work with picturebooks was, and still is, monumental. Dunn fought fiercely to ensure the idea behind using 'REAL picture BOOKS (...) written for children's enjoyment and enrichment with no specific language teaching aim' (Dunn, 1997, p. 1) would spread amongst teachers and parents. Teachers in Portugal have fond memories of a young learner conference in Lisbon in 2001, when Dunn arrived with a large suitcase full of her 'Real Books', which she slowly passed around participants in her workshop as she talked through the different ideas she had for using these beautiful objects with children. If Ellis and Brewster can be credited with providing the structure for teachers to include the picturebook in their planning, Dunn is responsible for the enthusiasm with which countless teachers have foraged in bookshops to find the many titles she recommended, as well as recognizing the relevance of choosing titles for boys. Issue 11 of *Real Book News*, for example, suggests picturebooks which break the mould of thematic-based selection, proffering books such as *Tusk, Tusk* by David McKee, a book about hatred and tolerance, or *The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew it Was None of his Business* by Werner Holzworth and Wolf Erlbruch, a scatological masterpiece!

In 2002 Irma Ghosn's 'Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT' appeared in *ELT Journal*. It was the first article to discuss the picturebook in foreign language education through a more academic lens. Ghosn's article refers to 'authentic children's literature' and its value in developing academic language and thinking skills, as well as a tool for preparing children for English-medium schooling. She also discusses the

role of picturebooks as change agents. Ghosn's arguments are in line with the messages Ellis, Brewster and Dunn had been propagating since the early 90s, and with her article she reached wider academic circles. Ghosn concludes, 'in the increasingly global world, language skills, intercultural awareness, and emotional intelligence are high priorities, especially in our struggle to create a more just and peaceful world (...) children's literature can provide a motivating medium through which these needs can be addressed in the EFL class' (2002, p. 177). Since then, Ghosn has published widely on her research into the picturebook in L2 classrooms in Lebanon, contributing extensively to the growing body of empirical research now available, in particular providing evidence that classroom talk around picturebooks is qualitatively different to talk around textbooks (Ghosn, 2007; 2010; 2013b).

In November 2004, the first international picturebook conference, 'Picture Books and Primary EFL Learners', was held at the magnificent International Youth Library in Munich. It brought together teachers and researchers to share their research, ideas and approaches, supported by the British Council Germany, Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich and IATEFL Young Learner Special Interest Group. The resulting edited volume (Enever & Schmid-Schönbein, 2006) has become a reference for teachers and researchers in the field of foreign language education. A particular chapter stands out in the collection, 'Young interpreters: affective dimensions of bilingual children's response to pictures' by Evelyn Arizpe. It is the only chapter that does not refer to foreign language education, but shares the results of a longitudinal study (see Arizpe & Styles, 2003) that looks at 'how visual texts are read by children' (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 1). This marks a move towards bridging the gap between two fields of interest, children's literature scholarship and foreign language education, although it would take some time for researchers in the context of English language education to realize the implications of Arizpe and Styles's research on actual classroom practice.

In the following decade, the approach to including the picturebook in the foreign language classroom moved from focusing on the format as a resource for language work towards looking at the picturebook itself and the opportunities it brings to the classroom for discussion around certain topics with a focus on the learner. These affordances have taken three directions:

1. the picturebook as pivotal for education around values and respect for the Other, accompanying the intercultural turn in education generally (Delanoy, Eisenmann & Matz, 2015);
2. the relevance of understanding what a picturebook is, who it is for, how it is created and the effects its materiality has on its inclusion in the foreign language classroom;
3. a focus on learners' response to the picturebook when incorporated into the classroom, from pre-primary to upper secondary and even tertiary education.

Regarding the first direction, in 2010 Gail Ellis was responsible for the British Council online resource 'Promoting diversity through children's literature' – where eight picturebooks and accompanying classroom activities support teachers – introducing topics such as disability (*Susan Laughs*, Jeanne Willis & Tony Ross, 1999), bullying (*Is it because?* Tony Ross, 2005), tolerance (*Tusk, Tusk*, David McKee, 1978) and respect for the environment (*What if?* Mick Manning & Brita Granström, 2004). Since then, there have been many publications that discuss the picturebook in connection to sociocultural issues (e.g. Bergner, 2016; Bland, 2013a; Bland, 2014; Ghosn, 2013a; Lazar 2015; Mourão, 2013b; 2015).

The second direction was underpinned in 2010 when Sandie Mourão launched the blog, 'Picturebooks in ELT'. Her intention was to 'discuss picturebooks, in particular the pictures in them! Why? Because, in ELT we tend to select picturebooks because they contain words our students might know' (Mourão, 2010, June 18). Influenced by her research while completing her doctorate, Mourão sought to help teachers understand the relevance of understanding the picturebook, its multimodality and the associated metalanguage used to talk about the picturebook in the classroom. By now, children's literature scholarship was being referenced extensively in works embracing a focus on picturebooks in language education, such as *Children's Literature and Learner Empowerment. Children and Teenagers in English Language Education* (Bland, 2013a). The tendency to combine an understanding of ELT methodology with children's literature scholarship can also be observed in chapters on picturebooks in the language classroom

appearing in edited volumes (see Birketveit, 2013; Bland, 2013b; Burwitz-Melzer, 2013; Mourão, 2013a; 2015; Lazar, 2015).

The third and final direction picturebooks have taken in the last decade relates to the reader response research mentioned earlier. Reader response became germane to language education with the communicative approach, where texts, contexts and readers were recognized as interacting with each other to engage in literary readings (Hall, 2005, p. 122). However, the relevance of reader response in relation to a picturebook has only recently been taken into consideration. Research by Kaminsky (2013; 2016), Lugossy (2012; 2015) and Mourão (2012; 2013b; 2016) has evidenced that if learners' response is taken seriously in an approach which both values and recognizes the multimodality of the picturebook – its pictures, words and the gaps between – together with the construction of personal significances prompted by these interactions, then authentic communication emerges from the authentic interaction between the learners, the picturebook and the teacher. What has become even more evident is the applicability of such an approach in classrooms for secondary-school students, with research looking at teenagers interacting with picturebooks (Lazar, 2015; Mourão, 2013b), and even studies that take picturebooks into prisons for high-security inmates who are learning English (Cristo, 2013). This is an interesting final viewpoint in the exciting journey the picturebook has made through language education.

Three of the articles in this issue are write ups of papers given at the symposium in Birmingham at the beginning of 2016.² Each provides examples of the applicability of the picturebook for content-based learning in English, and each represents a journey. Our first article, Smiljana Narančić Kovač's 'Picturebooks in Educating Teachers of English to Young Learners', describes the journey a faculty of education has taken to ensure that the picturebook has become an integral part of foreign language teacher education. You will read about a study programme Narančić Kovač developed for primary English teachers at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, where fortunate trainee teachers 'achieve a satisfactory level of competence and confidence needed to use picturebooks efficiently and creatively with young learners'.

Our second article, 'Promoting "Learning" Literacy through Picturebooks: Learning How to Learn' represents the journey Gail Ellis has followed in her work as an

educator, picturebook devotee and believer in the development of learner autonomy through English. Her article shares her first discoveries when she began using picturebooks in the 1980s, and goes on to describe how the picturebook, together with a focus on developing 'learning' literacy, can become 'an ethos, a culture and a way of life'. This article represents how the field of foreign language education has continued to incorporate the picturebook into its repertoire of practices, remaining parallel to the developments based on conceptual and empirical educational research described above.

Following this, Janice Bland's article 'English Language Education and Ideological Issues: Picturebooks and Diversity' examines the ideological dimensions of language education and the contribution the picturebook can make to 'diversity-sensitive, intercultural education'. Journeying through Byram's five-stranded model of intercultural learning, Bland discusses five picturebooks for the language classroom, concluding that: 'The verbal text can be at the same time manageable for language learners, while also poetically rhythmical. [And] the eloquent pictures of first-rate picturebooks help create an archive of mental images in our memory – increasing retention of the language, the characters celebrated in these books, and their message'.

Our fourth article discusses the use of the picturebook in an L1 context to support the development of intercultural competence. Xiaodi Zhou's 'An Arab American Boy Fights for his Voice: Finding Identity within Literature' shares his observations of an Arab American child and his struggle to make his voice heard during group booktalk. Zhou makes a clear case for using a critical discourse lens to understand the multifarious implications of cultural identity manifested in booktalk interactions. The article shares the journey of those with a 'faraway home' – in this case both a participant of the study as well as the researcher – towards supporting the development of a transactional approach in the literacy classroom, while using student voices to enrich interpretation and understanding.

The 4.2 issue of the *CLELEjournal* includes a *Recommended Venue* – fittingly The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Massachusetts, the first full-scale museum in the United States devoted to national and international picturebook art. Naomi Hamer shares the delights she discovered there when visiting the museum in 2016. Finally, Janice Bland reviews *Reading for Learning. Cognitive approaches to children's literature*

(Nikolajeva, 2014), and shares her thoughts on the aptness of Nikolajeva's ideas for the language classroom.

As always, we wish to thank all who have contributed to this issue.

Happy reading,

Sandie Mourão and Janice Bland

¹All issues are available for download through the British Council website. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/real-books>

² Sandie Mourão spoke about 'Responding to picturebook design and aesthetics', and her article can be found in the *CLELEjournal* 4.1 (see Mourão, 2016). Opal Dunn spoke about 'Picturebooks and parents', a topic she is well known for (see Dunn, 2010).

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