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Children's Literature in a Multiliterate World

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Research by Scholars of Children's Literature: A Global Perspective on Literacy Education, Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding

This edited collection of twelve chapters written by children's literature specialists from different continents is based on papers presented at the *35th International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress* that took place in Auckland, New Zealand in 2016. It starts with an introduction by the editors based on Bishop's (1990) conceptualization of children's literature as providing windows and mirrors to young readers, in other words as offering them the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the mirrors provided by stories and to discover the lives of others through the windows the stories open onto the world. The introduction presents the structure of the book which is in two parts, the first consisting of five chapters addressing the ways in which children's literature can enhance intercultural understanding, and the second comprising another five chapters focused on how children's literature can be positioned pedagogically to enhance intercultural understanding.

Children's Literature, Space, Identity and Culture

Following the introduction, the editors had the brilliant idea to include the inspiring and moving contribution that Chinese author, Cao Wenxuan gave on receiving the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award, entitled '*Literature: Another form of house building*'. In his address, Cao Wenxuan explains that houses are crucially important to children because they are synonymous with a home and a home means shelter and shelter means security and freedom. He explains therefore that when he writes for children, he is building houses for

them, houses made of language, and his aim is 'to protect them from violent winds and furious storms' (p. 13).

The notions of space and belonging are taken up in Chapter 3 by Morrow, who provides a very fine analysis of the prevalent sense of space in Australian picturebooks for children, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Illustrations are examined and show a predominance of rural homes, the bush and beaches in the representation of space, expressing a pervasive sense of nostalgia. Morrow's analysis leads to an interesting question: Which readers will feel at home in these representations of space? She then explains that a major change happened in the 1970s when Aboriginal culture started to feature in books for children, but that today there is still a surprising lack of books representing the contemporary experiences of children living in suburbs, inner city, and high-density urban settings in Australia.

Chapter 4 is written by a Samoan author of children's books, Emma Kruse Vaai, who takes the reader through the history of literacy education on the South Pacific island. She starts with Christian missionaries in the 1800s teaching Samoan people to read the bible in Samoan, then moves to Western colonization in the 1900s with the imposition of English as the language of instruction. She then explains the postcolonial present with examples of bilingual stories describing the endangered Pacific environment in a variety of Pacific island languages and English. This chapter exemplifies beautifully the importance of publishing bilingual books that can travel across the oceans to tell the stories of faraway islands in the Pacific as well as developing a diasporic community of readers in the Pacific.

In Chapter 5, Bloom and Hanamitsu explore the relationship between the transnational and multicultural identity of famous author-illustrator Allen Say, and stories from two of his books are analyzed. What is striking is the role of autobiography in the author's choice of values to model for children via characters – persons who have successfully navigated migration and their sense of displacement and developed resilience as a result, enabling them to forge their own transcultural identity.

Brooking, in Chapter 6, focuses on human rights to foster empathy towards refugee children and give value to their experiences. The context is New Zealand and its curricular

focus on cultural diversity and inclusion. The main question posed will be of interest to educators today: How can children's literature be a potential resource for the development of a human rights culture, and thus aim to make a difference to the lives of all children, those who have to flee war and poverty and those living in the host country? Several graphic novels (including the well-known *Arrival* by Shaun Tan) are analyzed from the point of view of representation of trauma and pointing to the need for teachers to help their students understand how books work, as well as what the story means, specifically in the case of wordless books.

Cognitive literary theory is the background to Chapter 7 by Purcell, who explores the interactions and transactions of readers of different ages with literature, or, in other words, how reading fiction causes the brain to produce emotional and cognitive responses. The first part of the chapter reviews recent scholarship on theory of mind and the second looks at three picturebooks and how they relate to the child reader's development of their theory of mind ability. Three developmental stages in which children acquire beliefs or discover how the mind works are clearly illustrated through an analysis of the verbal and visual strategies of the three picturebooks. The use of metacognitive talk to support children to engage deeply with stories and their cultural messages is also interestingly illuminated.

Children's Literature and Interculturality: Pedagogical Affordances

The second part of the book focuses on children's literature and how it can be used to foster intercultural understanding. Five chapters take the reader to classrooms in Scotland, New Zealand, the United States, Flanders and South Africa and exemplify further the many implications of using picturebooks as a multifaceted pedagogic resource. In Chapter 8, we are given another example of the ways in which theory of mind can be instantiated as well as enhanced in young children. Dey uses cognitive critical analysis as a framework for a very interesting empirical study with nine multilingual and multi-ethnic primary school children in Glasgow. Four books by Emily Gravett – described as meta-fiction because of the complex dynamic between text and images and the way they blur the gap between the real and the imagined – were used to investigate the emotional literacy of the children and to transform them 'into picturebook detectives, observant and critical readers' (Dey, p. 112).

A fascinating cultural literacy context is the subject of Duder's chapter (Chapter 9), who analyzes her 12-year-old son's approach to reading what she refers to as 'the Maori World', a world where the literacies required are not language-bound. The notion of cultural literacy is beautifully explained for the reader to understand the distinct identity of Maori people, including those who no longer speak their own language. Defined as the ability to think in culturally appropriate ways, it expands from the priority given to print and textual literacy to an ability to read tribal landscapes, for example, to sing songs as well as share their culture through singing songs, to understand Maori creation narratives and to participate in ceremonies and contests.

Chapter 10 by Avecedo and Short will be most useful to researchers and teachers who wish to deepen their understanding of the notion of intercultural education and how it can be implemented using global literature with children. Through the transcripts of literature discussions and play of two groups of bilingual Latinx children in kindergarten and primary school in the US Southwest, the reader can follow the authors' choices of global books, their instructional strategies and their thorough analysis of intercultural understanding as knowledge, perspective and action. The necessary connections between these three dimensions are thoroughly argued and exemplified when the authors explain, for example, that children can notice inequity but may not necessarily know how to challenge it; thus they can be open-minded but unable to take action thoughtfully. In other words, the ultimate aim of Avecedo and Short's instructional model is that children learn to live their intercultural understandings in their daily lives.

Flanders, a Dutch speaking region of Belgium is the context of Chapter 11 by Devos. who discusses the programme 'O Mundo: The World in a library', a project with the aim of providing migrant and refugee children with picturebooks written in their family languages to spark philosophical discussions. Two sets of ten books in different languages were collated and translated into Dutch, along with teacher's notes, audio-versions read by a proficient user, and a guide to organizing read-aloud sessions in libraries and schools with the collaboration of parents / caregivers. The success of the project is all the more admirable in a context where nearly 80% of teachers believe that children should not be allowed to speak their family

languages at school. The project had a great impact in libraries, which extended their collections to non-Western European languages. That said, the author did not evade the challenging issue of how to select books to reflect cultural elements and how to avoid the danger of reducing such cultural aspects to stereotypes.

The final chapter (Chapter 12) takes the reader to South Africa. Bloch offers a stimulating analysis of the impact of the colonial, apartheid and postcolonial ideologies responsible for the low levels of literacy among young indigenous children. In this multilingual context, the author explains how the dominance of high-quality literature in English can be of little relevance for African language speakers and she argues for the critical importance of context for young children to learn effectively. She also denounces the various assessment approaches centred on a skills-based view of reading and instead, defends a more holistic approach: one that orients children to comprehension, communication and imagination, in other words, encouraging young children from the beginning to behave like readers. Based on a view of literacy as socio-cultural practice, Bloch and her colleagues designed the *Nal'ibali National Reading for Enjoyment Campaign* to motivate adults to understand that any time can be storytime with children. Concretely, informal reading clubs were set up with storytelling promoted in homes, clinics, parks and libraries. This beautifully written chapter makes for fascinating reading about the engagement of literacy activists who know how important it is to listen to children to understand their life experiences and then to share stories with them so as to enhance their learning and 'lead them on a nourishing and educational shared voyage of discovery' (Bloch, p. 177).

Readers will have gathered from the above summary what a rich and diverse panorama of educational contexts are described and why children's literature should be re-positioned at the heart of multilingual and intercultural education. Three main themes run through the book: the role of stories for children to understand themselves and others, the role of languages, in the plural, and specifically home languages in literacy learning, and the role of culture in literacy acquisition. All 12 chapters draw on a range of theoretical frameworks to investigate the meaning-making processes young readers engage in when they are told, read, or are reading stories. Notions such as identity, interculturality, theory of mind, empathy, cognitive

approaches to literature, multilingualism, the relationship between oracy and literacy, funds of knowledge are discussed and then illustrated through a wealth of pedagogical practices and concrete projects, that will help practitioners to reflect further on their own positioning regarding literacy teaching and perhaps empower them to transform their own pedagogical approaches.

It is obvious that all of the authors in the book are multilingual individuals themselves and are thoroughly engaged in rethinking literacy approaches that include not just a superficial intercultural dimension but a critical understanding of literacy education. This is based on exploring notions of difference, of alterity and empathy, through opening children's minds to global cultures in their own multicultural contexts. Throughout the book, readers will also discover authors of children's books they might not have encountered previously and many examples of books they might want to use with their own students. Some colour illustrations accompany the discussions and focus on the multimodal dimension of reading, as well as examples of children's artwork or, in Bloch's chapter, of children enacting, telling or composing stories for their teachers to write down.

This book will appeal to researchers interested in children's literature, as well as to literacy educators who will appreciate the combination of new theoretical approaches, and the ample choice of practical implementation in many diverse contexts. After all, there are not so many books available which tackle the interplay between literacy acquisition, multilingualism and intercultural education and exemplify such critical engagement with literacy teaching. As a researcher in the field of multilingual children's literature, I enjoyed the fact that the book is not Eurocentric. Duder's chapter in particular is an excellent example of how culture should be understood, that is as the lived experience of individuals, and through the transmission of a community's values. Finally, as a teacher educator, I think Daly and Limbrick's book will be most useful for future teachers to understand how children read, how they engage with a text and how they make meaning from literary texts. Therefore, literacy teaching is about telling stories to children at school (and also in their communities), because stories will help them to grow up and to understand themselves, Others and the world around them, to decentre from

their own perspectives, and develop a love of reading that will nourish them throughout their lives.

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