

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL: The Challenge of Complexity – In-depth Learning in ELT

JANICE BLAND

i

Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy in the Literature Classroom: Reading *Matilda* with Student Teachers

MARIE WALLIN

1

Avoiding Bernard: The Illustration of Insecure Attachment in *Not Now, Bernard*

BARBARA KATHARINA RESCHENHOFER

21

Teachers' Scaffolding Roles during Picturebook Read-Alouds in the Primary English Language Classroom

MARIA NILSSON

43

Bob Graham's Magic in the Everyday: Applying a Mindful Approach to the Reading of Picturebooks

ANNA LEFEVRE

68

Teachable Texts:

Recommendations for Embracing an Expanded Notion of Text in ELT

HOUMAN SADRI, WENDY KING, HEIDI HAAVAN GROSCH, DAVID VALENTE, CLAIRE STEELE AND SARAH SMITH

89

The Challenge of Complexity – In-depth Learning in ELT

Janice Bland

In-depth learning suggests a deepening of learning, but also a widening of learning – embracing connections between school subjects, and connections to students' out-of-school lives. As Matthew Lipman (2003) writes, 'the focus of the educational process is not on the acquisition of information but on the grasp of relationships within and among the subject matters under investigation' (p. 19). This could not be more significant in the current times, when, following the Covid-19 pandemic,

learning has become a secluded matter with many who are involved in education – students, teachers, scholars – remaining more isolated than pre-pandemic. Universities in numerous countries continue to embrace remote working and learning, and many education institutions now rely ever more on computer-mediated communication. However, when students interact with other students and teachers through a screen, social engagement can resemble the mostly one-sided nature of parasocial interaction. This shift to mediated communication can result in blurring the differences between social and parasocial relationships.

Very often young people already have one-sided relationships, for example with celebrities and media personalities, but also as fans of favourite games, authors, or book characters. Such experiences take place largely in the imagination, as the relationships are not reciprocal. Nonetheless, parasocial interactions, using social networking services such as TikTok or affinity spaces that are motivated by a common interest, such as fanfiction, offer the solace of a sense of belonging, and even create global digital tribes. Young people may feel more secure in parasocial interactions: there is no risk of rejection from the personalities, celebrities, or fictional figures who have no awareness of their existence. Even university lecturers and teachers who meet students on Zoom or Teams can seem more safely removed from them through lack of face-to-face contact, which may shield students from feelings of inefficacy or unpreparedness. However, such parasocial interactions may be more one-sided than participatory, and there is likely to be less opportunity for guidance, peer critical thinking and dialogic in-depth learning than in in-person social relationships in the classroom.

What has this to do with real books, multimodal texts, and deep reading? When the goal is the potential of inquiry into multifaceted artefacts in the ELT classroom, as in this and previous issues of *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, experiences need to be shared in a participatory manner. In dialogue we might become more aware of our different lenses (feminist, ecocritical, anthropocentric, classist, adultist, and so forth), sharing how we take in evidence, moving beyond our own limited perspectives. Knowledge formation is contingent rather than absolute, and focusing on the complexity of in-depth learning encourages teachers to acknowledge their fallible stance (Lipman, 2003, p. 18).

Students, meanwhile, may engage deeply with fictional figures, forming strong parasocial relationships, especially when not only books but also films and fanfiction are involved. If authors are idealized figures, disappointments on learning that a favourite author (like all human beings) is flawed, may cause readers to re-evaluate their opinions of the book and its characters. However, authors, like teachers, artists, and all adults, are imperfect, and there will always be worrying things to discover. With quite a few male artists it is way worse than 'worrying things': the misogynist Picasso, Paul Gauguin with his 11-year-old Tahitian child-bride (Ponnambalam, 2022), Roman Polanski and Woody Allen, both named as preying upon vulnerable girls, to mention just a few. Roald Dahl's sometimes politically incorrect humour and use of inventive and playful but frankly offensive language to describe the appearance of characters he dislikes (and expects the implied reader to dislike) and JK Rowling's contentious views on gender identity (which caused major political controversy in Scotland) cannot be compared to such transgressions, though they may have caused upset and pain.

As both Dahl and Rowling have shown their readers through their books, adults can be scary and bad things can happen, meanwhile our focus of classroom booktalk should be on the art and what we do with it, not on the fallible artist. Roald Dahl had previously edited his own work when critical readings highlighted problems, for example in a later edition of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* he revised the importation of African Oompa-Loompas as factory workers due to recognized overtones of slavery (Corbin, 2012). Contemporary readers often feel a sense of ownership over favourite texts, and this can be exaggerated when students are encouraged to identify with characters – but in-depth learning requires the acknowledgement of complexity, critical issues, and critical distance.

Critical distance may be especially important with well-loved canonical texts, like Dahl's *Matilda*. We may thoroughly enjoy the wicked depiction of the two-dimensional Wormwoods (Matilda's parents), who remind us of the equally frightful Dursley family in *Harry Potter*. In this way the classist assumptions around the portrayal of the Wormwoods and Dursleys can easily be overlooked. Marie Wallin, in the first article in this issue, reports on her study in teacher education in Sweden on the potential of *Matilda* for teaching about social class prejudice, as well as critical literacy, social justice and inclusion. Wallin's thought-provoking findings reveal how *Matilda* can

unveil important issues around childhood reading for student teachers and their future students in the ELT classroom.

The next article, by Barbara Katharina Reschenhofer, examines another canonical work of children's literature: David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*. Reschenhofer uses an interdisciplinary approach to her analysis, and by means of attachment theory she gains a more in-depth understanding of the verbal and pictorial complexities of the picturebook. From her context in teacher education in Austria, Reschenhofer examines how texts like McKee's classic can be used to promote visual literacy, emotional literacy, theory of mind and co-operative booktalk in the English language classroom, or even ways to support children who suffer from a similar situation to that of the protagonist Bernard.

UK author Frank Cottrell-Boyce (2023), who won the Carnegie Medal for his *Millions*, and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for *The Unforgotten Coat*, a refugee story that can wondrously widen the reader's horizons, wrote on World Book Day: 'Of course I know there are important issues behind the Dahl row. But whatever you think of the rights and wrongs of sensitivity reading, surely it's equally important that all our children have access to a couple of shelves of books and a corner to read them in'. Providing widespread access to children's literature remains a mammoth and consistently ignored problem in most countries. This should surely outweigh our anxieties – usually White, middle-class, or even upper-class, as Camilla, Queen consort and Rishi Sunak, the UK prime minister have added their voices (Khomami, 2023) – about rather slight, and unexceptional, sensitivity edits.

Another huge problem that is squarely addressed in the next article is the pervasive lack of support in teacher education to prepare ELT teachers and student teachers to use authentic literary texts and multimodal narratives for collaborative meaning-making: Maria Nilsson reports on her investigations of read-alouds orchestrated by three Swedish teachers of English. With the aim to inspire more teachers to explore the potential of picturebooks in ELT, Nilsson's study proposes a systematizing and clarifying of the complex scaffolding roles involved in interactive picturebook read-alouds and 'the intricate interplay between the teacher, the learners, the context and the story'.

The final article, by Anna LeFevre, applies a mindful approach to three picturebooks by Bob Graham. This contribution centres on the notion of connectedness that belongs to in-depth

learning – connecting to others, broader connections in education, and connecting to the world beyond the classroom. LeFevre, writing from a German teacher education context, argues with many examples that Bob Graham's picturebooks model a mindful way of viewing the world, and encourage noticing and active thinking, while challenging 'previously known or assumed information' and providing space 'for uncertainty, ambiguity, creativity, and aberrant responses'.

In the closing contribution, a new title is provided for recommended works of children's literature, 'Teachable Texts: Recommendations for Embracing an Expanded Notion of Text in ELT'. David Valente introduces the recommendations provided by Houman Sadri, Wendy King, Heidi Haavan Grosch, Claire Steele and Sarah Smith. Their recommendations are designed, as always in this feature, to help teachers to engage more deeply with text, and this time focusing especially on a broad concept of text. As in-depth learning advocates, the contributions propose both a widening and deepening of learning, which may involve nuance, cognitive dissonance, and complexity at the core of our shared experience.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue!

Bibliography

- Cottrell-Boyce, Frank (2004). *Millions*. Macmillan.
- Cottrell-Boyce, Frank (2011). *The Unforgotten Coat*. Walker Books.
- Dahl, Roald (1964). *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. George Allen & Unwin.
- Dahl, Roald (1988). *Matilda*. Jonathan Cape.
- McKee, David (1980). *Not Now, Bernard*. Andersen Press.
- Ponnambalam, Devika (2022). *I Am Not Your Eve*. Bluemoose Books.

References

- Corbin, C. (2012). Deconstructing Willy Wonka's chocolate factory: Race, labor, and the changing depictions of the Oompa-Loompas. *The Berkeley McNair Research Journal*, 19, 47–63.

-
- Cottrell-Boyce, F. (2023, March 2). Roald Dahl is the last thing we should worry about on World Book Day. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/mar/02/roald-dahl-world-book-day-frank-cottrell-boyce>
- Khomami, N. (2023, February 23). Camilla tells authors to 'remain true to calling' amid Roald Dahl row. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/23/camilla-roald-dahl-books-row>
- Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840272>