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## Positioning *Children's Literature in English Language Education* within English Language and Literature Education

**Janice Bland**

Welcome to issue 12.1 of *Children's Literature in English Language Education*!

Children's literature is a field of study that stretches across several established disciplines, particularly literary studies and pedagogy. The same can be said of language education as a field of study, which is informed by applied linguistics on the one hand, and subject pedagogy on the other. To some extent this already explains the positioning of the *CLELEjournal*, as it has an interconnecting location between research interests, related to but distinct from other well-established research areas and journals. *Reading in a Foreign Language* (<https://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl>), for example, is an open access international journal first established in 1983, which is edited and peer reviewed by applied linguists with a focus on reading in any language and with any age group. RFL articles consequently seldom have the primary and secondary school or teacher education focus of CLELE. Despite its similar name, *Children's Literature in Education*, which was founded already in 1970 (<https://link.springer.com/journal/10583>), has both a related and dissimilar emphasis. The journal is edited and peer reviewed by children's literature scholars, and like the *CLELEjournal*, CLE features articles on children's literature from many different cultural contexts, but unlike CLELE, *Children's Literature in Education* does not have a focus on language education. Our partner journal, *Libri & Liberi* (<http://www.librietliberi.org/>) is also focused on children's literature but not on language teaching, and like all journals mentioned here it has an international board of well-recognized peer reviewers. Importantly – and no doubt also due to a great amount of highly qualified voluntary editing – *Libri & Liberi* is a diamond open access journal, like the *CLELEjournal* and *Reading in a Foreign Language*.

Taken together, language and literature education research demonstrates that linguistic, aesthetic and sociocultural concerns are interdisciplinary, and are often contextualized within wider critical (sometimes socially polarizing) themes. This is ever more so in the case of English teaching, for the central role of English as a lingua franca means that English is often the only option for

global communication. Thus, there is an increasingly urgent demand for an autonomous interdisciplinary status for ELT as a locus for promoting interculturality, plurilingualism, in-depth learning and critical thinking. Additionally, with its focus on primary and secondary school education, the *CLELEjournal* considers the wide range of literary texts for children and adolescents to add further opportunities for exercising critical literacy, the avoidance of single stories, promoting the stories of #ownvoices and all voices, so including stories of underrepresented, minoritized groups, such as the working class and LGBT+ communities. Also, the voices, responses and agency of language learners themselves are central. Claire Kramsch (2023) accentuates this point, 'the desire to give language learners a "voice," the power to command attention, the legitimate right to have their experience taken into account, their interpretation of events validated and adopted' (p. 22).

The *CLELEjournal* understands English as a lingua franca to be multicultural rather than culture-free – but eschewing the idea of 'target cultures', which often merely leads to the reproduction of dominant viewpoints. Instead, one aim of ELT has been called polyvocality, or 'the principle of multivoicedness' (Decke-Cornill, 2007), which, according to my definition,

refers to the proposition that in order to avoid a dominance of an already overrepresented perspective (usually male, White and from the West), texts from different origins should be studied in an ensemble. New voices may challenge traditional positions and invite critical thinking. (Bland, 2022, p. 310)

Thus, the *CLELEjournal* relates strongly to the aims of multicultural literature pedagogy, which seeks to embrace the diversity of cultural groups and interculturality as an integral part of story in our multicultural world.

This issue begins with a study that took place in Sweden with student teachers for the youngest grade levels 1 – 3. Non-human nature could well be categorized as 'minoritized' through lacking a voice, and Malin Brock's paper 'Developing student teachers' sustainability competence through picturebooks' details an endeavour to answer the call for educators of all kinds to promote sustainability. The teacher education sequence in Brock's article encompassed four activities, which included student teachers' attempts at creating their own picturebooks (the participants' favourite activity but one that the author considers would need more preparation in a future

reiteration), and collectively researching and deciding on a list of selection criteria to support teachers in determining which picturebooks to introduce for sustainable development in their ELT classrooms.

The following paper is 'Peritextual elements in Chinese nonfiction picturebooks', authored by Sunah Chung, Jongsun Wee and Sohyun Meacham. The focus of their study was to examine the peritextual information as well as the insider/outsider status of the book creators of Chinese and Chinese American nonfiction picturebooks. Interestingly, the authors found that to evaluate the authentic quality of multicultural nonfiction picturebooks, examining the peritextual information could be an even more important indicator than the cultural heritage of the book creators.

Diego Sigrist and Michael Prusse have contributed the next paper, 'A multiliteracies approach to the graphic novel adaptation of *Stormbreaker*: Facilitating authentic reading in a Swiss lower secondary ELT classroom'. The authors describe how teachers might smartly thwart the reading blip (an adolescent's drop-off of interest in reading) by providing language learners with opportunities to show their potential through their own very creative adaptations of the popular Anthony Horowitz spy story and its graphic novel adaptation. The results with normally underachieving learners were particularly noteworthy.

In the next article, 'Life skills and literary texts about the First World War', author Torunn Skjærstad reports on a study that used a text ensemble of historical prose and poetry in a lower secondary school English class in Norway. Skjærstad writes, 'historical information should be integrated to facilitate critical thinking and expressions of empathy' (p. 88), and she further notes: 'the past shapes the way we understand the present and it is therefore necessary to address and deal with misconceptions about history as they could be harmful and even dangerous for our democracy' (p. 89). Comparably, but with the USA in mind, Henry Giroux (2022) cautions that, disguised as 'patriotic education', matters of historical memory and justice are vanishing from classrooms, while social media platforms function as the new teaching machines, 'relentlessly reproducing a culture of propaganda' (p. 10).

Li Ding has contributed the next paper, 'Drama and AI for teaching picturebooks in ELT'. Exemplifying her work with Chris Wormell's picturebook, *The Big Ugly Monster and the Little Stone Rabbit*, the author describes a potentially beneficial combination between drama activities

and text-based generative AI tools, with the aim of promoting critical AI literacy development with young language learners. It is interesting how the author's work illustrates biases inherent in AI-generated imaginings of monsters, and the significance of students' effective prompt-generation ability.

A book review of Megan Echevarría's edited volume (2023) *Rehumanizing the Language Curriculum* follows. This is reviewed by Jocelyn Wright, who describes the book as 'traversing the interconnected expanses of language, literature, and culture' (p. 115), so also at the hub of a disciplinary intersection. Last but not least, Alyssa Lowery introduces the topic of 'Children in zones of conflict' for our Recommended Reads for this issue, which includes 'narratives that sensitively bear witness to the historical and contemporary tragedies that affect millions while fulfilling the societal expectation that children's literature must offer optimism and hope' (p. 120). The chosen books have been selected by the following contributors: Sarah Minslow on the verse novel *Inside Out and Back Again*, Bhakti Verma on the chapter book *Nida Finds A Way*, Wafa Pathan on the picturebook *The Journey*, and Janice Bland on Naidoo's *Children of the Stone City*, an allegorical young adult novel on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue!

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