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Editorial: ELT as a Pluricultural Space

Janice Bland and Sandie Mourão

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

Recently it has been increasingly argued that children's individual language repertoires and diverse cultural identities should play a more valued role in ELT. Plurilingualism, which refers to having a repertoire of more than one language, has been shown by cognitive research to support 'heightened mental flexibility and creative thinking skills, enhanced metalinguistic awareness, and greater communicative sensitivity' (Lazaruk, 2007, p. 605). The *Children's Literature in English Language Education* journal favours the use of the neutral acronym ELT when referring to language education, and finds the construct 'English as a foreign language' (EFL) problematic – the concept of foreignness suggesting English is 'owned' by certain groups and is foreign to others. This goes against the fluid concept of English as a lingua franca, or even *Englishes*, for international communication, and rather seems connected to the popular notion of nations as discrete entities and complete unto themselves, and languages as having distinctly marked boundaries. With such a perspective, heritage or minority languages might be seen to be in competition with the majority language of a particular country, and English may be feared as the hegemonic language. If, on the other hand, we see languages and cultures as enriching each other, as the contributions to this issue put forward, then plurilingualism and pluriliteracy – speaking and reading in different languages – will be highly valued in the classroom, school community and society.

An area of competence in the *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors* has been newly defined as 'facilitating pluricultural space', a concept that

reflects the notion of creating a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors, i.e. the capacity of dealing with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration (Council of

Europe, 2018a, p. 122).

Young people's eagerness in learning about the world indicates the sociocultural dimension of language learning is of high importance for them. Moreover, the development of intercultural competence is important for a culture of democracy, which consists of certain values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding, according to the recently published *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*. All of the following ELT relevant concepts are included in this framework:

- valuing human dignity, human rights and cultural diversity,
- attitudes of openness to cultural otherness and to other world views and tolerance of ambiguity,
- autonomous learning skills, critical thinking, listening and observing skills, empathy, flexibility and adaptability, co-operation skills, communicative and plurilingual skills,
- knowledge and critical understanding of the self, and of language and communication, knowledge and critical understanding of human rights, culture and cultures, media, environment and sustainability. (Council of Europe, 2018b, p. 38)

The articles in this issue are about sensitive interacting in a pluricultural space while making use of children's literature set in different cultural contexts. The first paper, Saskia Kersten and Christian Ludwig's 'Translanguaging and Multilingual Picturebooks: Gloria Anzaldúa's *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado*', explores the awareness of plurilingualism and multilingualism as a valuable resource. As the authors explain, commonly '*multilingual* is used at societal level, describing the many languages used by societal groups, whereas *plurilingual* describes an individual's knowledge of two or more languages at varying degrees of competence' (p. 8). Kersten and Ludwig illustrate their argument for valuing translanguaging in ELT, also in countries like Germany where English is not the majority language, with Gloria Anzaldúa's dual language picturebook (English/Spanish). They examine the findings that, even with English as the medium of instruction, 'the learners' home languages,

other languages and language varieties spoken in the school and personal environments, all influence their learning process and the formation of cultural identities' (p. 7).

Margarida Morgado's article 'Minority Cultures in Your School: A CLIL Approach' showcases how the picturebook *My Two Blankets* (Kobald & Blackwood, 2014) can be used in a Content and Language Integrated Learning approach to deepen primary school children's understanding of cultural identity as well as language learning, specifically 'to address cultures as identities and ways of thinking about the world' (p. 28). As Morgado writes (p. 29) 'all the languages a child uses and learns are significant in defining their shifting multiple identities. Thus, it is important for teachers to acknowledge that all children bring these funds of knowledge to the classroom.'

The Recommended Venue – which spotlights a venue connected to children's literature in a different country each issue – is contributed by Olivia Mair, and describes *The Literature Centre*, Fremantle, Australia. Housed in 'what was once one of Australia's most notorious maximum-security prisons' (p. 1), this extraordinary venue is now dedicated to educating about children's literature, 'nurturing and promoting authors and illustrators and supporting educators in using literature' (p. 4). The Recommended Reads – which introduce four highly suitable works of children's literature for ELT each issue – have been contributed by Sissil Lea Heggernes, Mateja Dagarin Fojkar, Ivana Cindrić and Karoline Sjøgaard. Maria Eisenmann's book review examines *Using Literature in English Language Education. Challenging Reading for 8-18 Year Olds* (ed. Bland, 2018). Eisenmann shares her thoughts on the broad range of literary formats and genres discussed in the volume, which she sums up as 'a collection of very convincing and refreshing approaches' (p. 50).

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue.

Happy reading,

Janice Bland and Sandie Mourão

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