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Editorial: Cultural Identity in the Language Classroom

Janice Bland and Sandie Mourão

Welcome to the sixth issue of the *CLELEjournal*!

This issue focuses on picturebooks for primary and secondary-school teaching. Each paper is notable for the seriousness with which the child's cultural identity is treated in the language classroom. The valuing of children's responses, whether in English or in the children's own language(s), which may or may not be the majority language, is currently a matter of frequent debate. A related theme is children's right to ethnic self-esteem – a particularly timely concern with respect to the ever-increasing, and frequently desperate, immigrant and refugee situations in many of our schools.

Narratives metaphorically represent multiple aspects of culture and as such – as is often stated – offer windows onto other worlds. They also act as *mirrors* – as the imagined world reflects a new light onto the reader's own world. However, children in minority and refugee situations are frequently disadvantaged in their reading and participation in storyworlds – lacking mirrors of their own cultural identity: 'When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when images they see are distorted, negative or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part' (Bishop, 1990). Thus, multicultural picturebooks are particularly valuable for today's heterogeneous classrooms.

Alter's chapter highlights a need for a greater critical awareness – on the part of secondary students and their teachers – of a questionable assimilationist ideology towards immigrant children, subtly reflected in some acclaimed picturebooks for children. After a discussion of ideology as manifested in (children's) literature, and a consideration of assimilation practices for children from minority backgrounds in the US, Alter analyses two picturebooks, *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003) and *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), and considers their use in the EFL and EAL/ ELL classroom with 12 – 18 year olds. Alter shows how these books support secondary-school students 'in thinking

critically about the ideologies presented in multicultural picturebooks' (p. 21) and simultaneously argues for the rights to difference of ethnic minorities in our classrooms and their need for ethnic self-esteem.

Mourão's paper, 'Picturebooks in the Primary EFL Classroom: Authentic Literature for an Authentic Response,' revisits the manifold promising connections between picturebooks and the central concern of English language teaching – rich and meaningful communication. Mourão analyses picturebooks as artefacts, then details and reports on systematic categorizations of children's spontaneous and engaged oral response when a picturebook is offered as a compound literary form. Her examples are taken from Portuguese children's experiences with – and holistic response to – the picturebooks *I'm the Best* (Cousins, 2010) and *No!* (Altés, 2011).

The article 'Azzi in Between – A Bilingual Experience in the Primary EFL Classroom' takes the crucial role education must play in supporting children in refugee situations seriously, both in the EFL classroom and in interdisciplinary learning. Bergner set up the project she reports on in her paper before the latest escalation of the refugee crisis in Europe. Its message has since become more relevant than ever for the day-to-day life of countless children in schools in Germany and other European countries, as well as classrooms throughout the world. So the sharing of successful practice with 8 – 9-year-old children in an EFL classroom using *Azzi in Between* (Garland, 2012) is particularly welcome and timely.

This issue's Recommended Venue is Seven Stories – The National Centre for Children's Books. This time, a Northern England's Aladdin's cave of children's literature has been chosen for the *CLELEjournal*. Pavlik describes a once-upon-a-time Victorian waterside mill – now the fascinating Seven Stories – that has the mission to share the 'rich literary tradition of writing and illustrating books for children in the UK' (p. 59).

Our feature, Recommended Reads, is supported for this issue by the educators Gail Ellis, Liesel Hermes, Anna Pires and Alan Pulverness. They each present an amazing book – two timeless classic picturebooks, an illustrated award-winning chapter book (a lesser-known format in the EFL world, but particularly useful to support reading in the lower to mid-secondary school in EFL contexts) and the newly emerging format so highly suitable

for language education in the upper secondary school – a verse novel. These are all books that can be ideally shared with different age groups as well as for individual pleasure reading.

Lima contributes our book review on *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom* (eds. Teranishi, Saito & Wales, 2015). The reviewer highlights the fact that three pioneers of language and literature education, Ronald Carter, Geoff Hall and Gillian Lazar, have all contributed to this edited volume as well as a wealth of innovative and welcome expertise from Japan.

We are happy to announce that our editorial team – Janice Bland, Christiane Lütge and Sandie Mourão, and assistant editor, Bill Templer – is to be strengthened by a new editor, Anthony Pavlik. We believe Anthony's research interests make him a perfect fit for the *CLELEjournal* team, and we are looking forward to working with him.

Happy reading!

References

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix-xi.