

Book review

***Thinking through Children's Literature in the Classroom*, edited by Agustín Reyes-Torres, Luis S. Villacañas-de-Castro and Betlem Soler-Pardo (2014). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 206 pages, Hardcover £44.99, ISBN: 978-1-4438-5336-1.**

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Thinking through Children's Literature in the Classroom is a collection of research papers which helps orient us in understanding literature as a central part of children's education. As it addresses a wide array of issues, both theoretically and practically, in relation to children's reading and education, it allows the reader to explore deeply the boundaries of teaching, education and children's literature and to expand into interdisciplinary approaches, including imaginative writing and critical thinking. Critical thought, aesthetic enjoyment and pedagogical awareness are well balanced and this equilibrium is unfolded across five parts, which altogether contain twelve chapters. Although the material is organized in such a manner, the prevailing idea and conceptualization of matters of concern are argued thoughtfully by contributors and carefully rendered by the editors of this collection, to make up a single unit that certainly bestows uniqueness and reliability to the collection as a whole.

Part I, entitled *Thinking theoretically*, consists of two papers which explore the boundaries of teaching, education and children's literature in novel ways. Chapter I is entitled *An 'Education to Reality': An Interdisciplinary Framework for Teaching Literature in the Classroom* (pp. 8-25). In this chapter Luis S. Villacañas-de-Castro navigates through the notion of 'education to reality' and the role of literature in this concept, postulating on the significance of interdisciplinary didactics. Chapter II, entitled *Exploring Education and Children's Literature* (pp. 29-41), written by Xavier Mínguez, thoughtfully explores children's literature as an educational component and also focuses on the development of literary competence.

Part II begins with *Literacy Education: The First Step towards Literacy Competence* (pp. 42-52) by Agustín Reyes-Torres. The author discusses in depth literacy competence as an essential part of education. Basing his argument on the development of literacy skills, he presents this as a key component to meet today's standards of education and the necessity of generating a literacy competence-based curriculum. In Chapter IV: *What does Reading, Literacy and Intercultural Education Mean?* (pp. 53-63), Josep Ballester reflects on how literature represents an interdisciplinary framework through which multiple levels of education are evident.

Part III, entitled *Thinking Teaching Practice* begins with *Chapter V: "Dragon be here": Teaching Children's Literature and Creative Writing with the Help of Maps* (pp. 64-78), by Björn Sundmark. This text discusses the concepts of maps, highlighting the idea that "Maps in children's books produce a fictional space for the reader, creating a vista of the secondary world in which the story is set" (p.64), as well as explaining the topology of maps in children's books. He then links his discussion of these resources to how map-making can be used as a tool for creative writing.

Chapter VI: Learning English through Children's Poetry (pp. 79-95), by Maria Luisa Alonso Soroa, persuasively puts forth the idea of how difficult it is to delineate children's poetry as "[b]oth childhood and poetry are social constructs and as such they are not static concepts" (p. 79). Nonetheless the author also recommends the integration of poetry into the classroom, highlighting awareness of reading poetry.

Part IV: *Thinking Children's Literature in EFL* is made up of the following chapters: *Chapter VII: The Role of Young Literature in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language*, written by Elena Ortells (pp. 96 - 111), thoroughly discusses the significance of literature in the formation of free spirits and how literature can be an instrument to develop critical awareness.

Rowena Coles, in *Chapter VIII: Oscar Wilde for Teachers and Pupils: A Model for Teaching L2 to Young Learners* (pp. 112 – 128), discusses how the learning of a foreign language can be achieved through stimulating context and the magic of a tale and the value of stories.

Chapter IX: Negotiating Miranda's Vision in the Classroom: Critical Encounters with Literature. From Archetypical Symbolism to Dystopian Fantasy (pp. 129 – 149), penned by Tzina Kaligirou and Kostantinos Malafantis, focuses on the importance of critical pedagogy when dealing with children's literature. The authors argue that readings derived from multiple, critical perspectives undoubtedly sustain the growth of critical awareness of the students. "Literature can inspire students to negotiate the present and anticipate tomorrow" (p. 143).

Part V, entitled *Thinking Children's Literature in Society*, is made up of three chapters. The first in this section, *Chapter X: The Worlds of Fiction of Alice in Wonderland, George's Marvellous Medicine, Harry Potter, and The Hunger Games in Catalan* (pp. 150 - 166), by Gemma Lluch, addresses issues like: "what happens when relevant books for children and young adults in English reach the literary train in Catalan? How are these books adapted; what changes do they create in the target culture" (p. 150). To accomplish her aims the contributor analyses the four pieces of literature mentioned in the title of the paper.

Chapter XI: White as Snow, Red as Blood, Black as Ebony...: Employing Film Adaptations of the Brothers Grimm Snow White as a Didactic Tool for Learning EFL, by Betlem Soler Pardo and Beatriz Martín Marchante, points out the significance of using movies in order to design educational guidance for teachers and offer a pedagogical tool for teaching EFL for the Spanish Baccalaureate (upper secondary). This guidance also opinions out how criticism is considered a paramount skill which must be promoted at any educational stage. This article also tells that "audiovisual material improves teaching quality in the classroom since technology motivates students and motivation is an essential prerequisite for success" (p. 178).

Finally, in *Chapter XII: "And her Step-Mother organized the Wedding": How the Violence and Inequalities in the Grimms' Collections Can Foster Social Integrative Behaviours in Children* (pp. 185-201), elaborated by María Alcantud Díaz, we see how some of Grimms' tales mentioned in the title could serve as a very essential instrument to cope with educational, social and practical dimensions which characterize key competences for lifelong learning, for instance, "interpersonal, intercultural and civic

competences connected to additional integrative social traits such as gender equalities and new family structure” (Introduction, p. 6).

This collection, constitutes a very interesting focus on both theoretical and practical issues concerning children’s reading and education, thereby resonating current pedagogical concerns. As it is stated in *Foreword* written by John McRae, the context is second or foreign language learning, but the principles forwarded ontologically and developed in perspective certainly apply to all reading, in all language learning contexts. Coinciding with the importance in the educational context of the development of the fifth skill -the thinking skill- and the acquisition of processing skills for all kinds of visual and verbal texts, the chapters also explicitly explain the involvement of three levels of awareness in cognitive terms: language awareness, text awareness and cultural awareness.

Furthermore, this volume clearly attempts to clarify the general expectations and social demands for teachers and the educational context in general. It proposes the need for well-read teachers who are enthusiastic about their teaching in order to foster readers’ willingness and ability to read. The collection underscores “the role of teacher as a mediator and initiator of selected contents and readings that facilitate learning and illustrate their knowledge base and expertise” (p. 2). Additionally, the volume recommends that all educators must have sound pedagogic knowledge apart from deep literary expertise. In order to be well equipped with techniques aiming at developing students’ critical thinking skills through literature with pedagogical awareness, this volume provides insights and generates interest appropriate to all major trends and innovations that characterize this field of study, as a *mode of production* and value to be distributed in society.

As a multidisciplinary source, the volume obviously draws on knowledge from pedagogical studies, cultural studies, literary studies, history studies, curriculum studies and so on, all of which are well integrated into the overall composition of the book, providing resources for classroom contexts and beyond. Each chapter is well-referenced, and there are other complementary materials such as tables, charts and illustrations, along with discussion questions which open up further reflection of the content. The anthology is

of interest to everyone in the field: teachers, trainers, students, researchers and scholars (the volume can easily be used as a textbook) as well as anyone who is fond of reading, especially since it is easily accessible in content and style. The editors, Reyes-Torres, Villacañas-de-Castro and Soler-Pardo, have done an excellent job in pulling together this fascinating and useful anthology.

Author's reference

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