

Literature education in multicultural and/or plurilingual context

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Abstract

In the dynamism of a constantly changing society, with open borders across the world that allow the flow of populations from one country to another, it is an indisputable fact that there is no single cultural space, rather there exists an enriching heterogeneity in which cultures are shared. This reality obligates us, in the best notion of the expression, to alter our perspective; this change is not always a spontaneous one, rather, in most cases we need resources or support that *educates* us about living together.

The classrooms of educational institutions are a clear reflection and example of this social transformation in which diverse individuals and their respective cultures can gather together. Literature is an essential tool in such multicultural contexts whether they are monolingual or multilingual. Not only does a reader come from his or her own cultural background and carry with them characteristics and idiosyncrasies while interpreting a written text, but also literature itself is a vehicle for the transmission of culture and is thusly produced in close relation with it.

In this work, we present the theoretical assumptions which we rely on, as well as practical examples of how to execute such educational work in order to contribute to this world being a truly intercultural space.

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Literary education

What is literary education? Why is it necessary to teach literature? What benefits do we get from it? If we stop to reflect on these questions, the only valid response we can give to these or similar queries as instructors or future teachers is that, without a doubt, there exists an everlasting beneficial relationship between books and the reader.

Literature is, effectively, a basic tool in a person's education; it is an anthropological necessity, as some authors have called it, which manifests at an early age¹. Who has never asked to be told a story or have one read to them? Who has never been captivated, given the right circumstances (which are not necessarily set in stone, rather they can vary based on personal interests), when listening to a story? The way in which books help us understand the world has been a topic approached from diverse perspectives by different authors.

We know that, from a linguistic point of view, books enrich one's vocabulary and improve one's elocution and self-expression as well as other communicative capacities. And evidently, with texts produced to serve as a model, the reader incipiently senses the esthetics of that language. The reader can also relate to and associate with the text; they can intertextualize, that is to say, recall other texts and establish comparisons so that the reader becomes able to recognize the conventions that regulate different types of texts. Through this they can also gain cultural knowledge. This point of view would then bear a broad relation with strictly literary benefits, and it would support the development of literary competence.

Nonetheless, adults are not the only ones who are able to enjoy the richness of literature; the youngest of readers are also able to share in this delight.

Psychologically, it is held in high regard that children's literature helps children understand human problems. They identify familiar issues in the literature they read and relate those controversial situations to their realities, contemplating, as though in a movie, how those situations would play out. This, in turn, allows them to implement correct practical solutions. On occasion, when the difficulty or problem is urgent, literature gives them precipitated or permanent solutions, always within reach of the child's comprehension, which establishes order in their realities. It presents, in addition, instruction on moral norms not in an abstract sense, but rather in a tangible form much less forced and dramatic than if they were learned through a real life experience in the classroom or at home.

On the other hand, a text can communicate important messages to the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, and it helps to overcome the psychological problems of growth by organizing one's own dreams through images conceived through the structure of a story. At the same time, the reader sees basic human conflicts, thus showing them that fighting adversity is unavoidable and that there exist certain concepts in permanent duality. And, more importantly, literature can provide the reader with characters as role models who succeed without having social advantages; so it confirms that we must not seek out eternal happiness, rather we must learn to be happy when we have reached what we have set out to become or do in certain moments.

From an emotional perspective, reading for an adult, provided that it does not have a determined function (informational or for memorization, for example), can mean an escape from the world in which one lives, just "() por el puro gusto de leer, por amor invencible al libro, por ganas de estar con él horas y horas. ()" (Salinas, 1986:184)². For children, the contrary - the book provokes a combination of real life experiences with the development of one's creativity, of one's imagination and fantasy. Reading, at these ages, is an act based on reality by means of one's imagination and it allows the

pursuit of pleasure and of constant discoveries. The emotions experienced in the course of reading contribute to forming one's personality and enables access to what Colomer (1999) calls the collective imaginary.

This dimension, that we dare say develops almost exclusively on an individual level, can be complemented, from the literary field, by the social sphere. In line with this, reading becomes a means for efficient socializing that children should not go without, and which is necessary for their complete growth since it allows them to adopt social values that are transmitted through this medium either intentionally or implicitly. It deals with an ever accessible, open window to the world, from which one can observe and come to know other social and cultural realities, as well as other environments that may be more or less known, but then become more accessible.

Along the same lines, reading is also a way of relating to the world which in turn lets one establish channels of communication with their equals; with adults, the content of a book can be reason for debate or sharing opinions. Recently, because of this, many worries and uncertainties have arisen about how to foster reading in the family setting. We are not going to delve too much into that topic, so as not to get unnecessarily distracted³, but we will allude to the empathy that is established when parents read to their children and the opportunity therein afforded for relaxing conversation for both parties; an opportunity that is easily extended, if cultivated, to other contexts that form part of the social environment of the individual.

All this set forward allows us to talk about literary education as an instructive tool in multicultural contexts, an aspect that we will try to explain in the following section.

La educación, en efecto, no es sino una pugna, a menudo aflictiva, por sacar a los alumnos de sí mismos, de su estrecho mundo, para encaminarlos al encuentro de otros mundos, de otras voces. Es en ese territorio ajeno e incógnito donde se produce el verdadero aprendizaje. Aprender es un impulso de *ir hacia* lo ignorado, una voluntad de *abrirse a* la presencia de otros (Mata, 2009:17)⁴

Literature and culture: literary education as a resource for interculturality

So that all these benefits can be achieved, it is important that we not think of reading as only a technical ability. Reading is much more than deciphering a linguistic code. It is a process through which the individual constructs the meaning of a text upon relating language with thought. It deals with an interactive dialogue between the individual reader and the text in order to come to an understanding of the latter; an idea well illustrated by Garrido:

Lo que hace falta para que un niño -o un adulto- llegue a ser un lector de verdad es

ayudarlo a descubrir que la lectura de libros y la costumbre de escribir están relacionadas con la lectura y la transformación del mundo, y pueden tener un sentido profundo para su vida. Por eso no tiene objeto descomponer la lectura en sus destrezas mecánicas, tal como suele suceder en la enseñanza diaria (). Cuando la atención se concentra en estos aspectos secundarios y no en la comprensión del texto, se dificulta la formación del lector, pues se fragmenta la lectura, se le restan significado y sentido, se entorpece su comprensión e, *ipso facto*, la oportunidad de disfrutarla. A nada conviene que esté más atento un lector que a construir la comprensión de lo que lee. La clave para aprovechar y gozar sus lecturas es comprender: sumar significado y sentido, sentimiento y reflexión. (2004:48)⁵.

We arrive at another concept: reader comprehension. Reading, understood as a process of comprehension, requires an active, participating reader. Comprehension of the text depends on the capacity to process information and on the limits that may exist, as well as on other processes – cognitive, linguistic, psychological, informational, perceptual, and even anthropological.

Therefore, reader comprehension turns out to be a process of decrypting the text and relating it to experiences the reader already has. One must understand how the author structures and organizes the ideas in the text, as well as relate the information that one extracts from the text with other ideas already in the reader's memory. Therefore, in this process of ascertaining meaning from a text, the subject learns how to identify relevant ideas and relate them with those already in his or her mind.

This then would mean that different readers, given the same text, will be able to interpret the meaning of that text in different ways upon contributing their own experiences to the interpretation. All three components - the reader, the text, and the contextual factors - will influence the meaning. On the other hand, the form of the text will play a part as well, since it will generate distinct expectations, objectives and demands. The reader will begin by identifying the messages within the text and he or she will choose pieces of information and textual and contextual familiarities, thus constructing their own textual interpretation. The context that the reader comes from will also influence the meaning of a text, since readers belong to certain groups of people, shaped by their social context. Also, it is undeniable that every text is written in its own specific context. Abril Villalba (2004) expertly articulates it by differentiating between two concepts: meaning and interpretation. The first is derived from the text and is unique in and of itself and the second emerges from the relation between the text and its audiences, which have their own individual characteristics deemed plurality and variety.

All of this leads to distinguishing between types or levels of reader comprehension

that correspond, in a gradational form, to a greater understanding of the reading: literal, interpretive, and critical reader comprehension.

Literal comprehension implies a recognition and memorization of the facts such as they appear in the text, that is, a repetition of the main ideas, details and the sequence of events. This dimension is what is most often worked with in the classroom since this approach checks basic aspects of the reading act: memory, attention, linguistic comprehension, etc...

Interpretive comprehension supposes attributing meaning to what is taken from the text by relating it to personal experience and previous knowledge the student has. It is a process that enables the reader to actively participate in developing the meaning of that text through extracting the relevant information from the story and relating it to what the reader already possesses. A literary text must be read and enjoyed while understanding and interpreting its meaning. In relation to all of that we should also keep in mind that the literary text is a document related to culture and, upon being an actual text, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and aesthetic factors of that culture should be taken into account for understanding and for attributing meaning to the text. Professor Mendoza states this as such:

El interés por la utilización de los materiales literarios está en relación con la creciente valoración didáctica de la participación personal, la implicación, la interacción y la cooperación en todos los procesos de aprendizaje. (2007:10)⁶

Following this, the subject can perform a critical comprehension when they form their own judgments and expresses personal opinions about the content of what they have just read.

And how can all this become a resource for dealing with interculturality in the classroom? Let's review the basic ideas that we have discussed up to this point: on one hand, we know that the individual, from birth, absorbs the characteristics of his culture as he comes to know them and the classroom becomes a meeting place for children with their respective cultural knowledge; on the other hand, we have assumed that literature, in addition to contributing to linguistic and literary evolution, has a positive effect on the emotional and psychological dimensions of an individual; also, we are convinced that reading plays a part in the social relations that the reader establishes; likewise, we have clarified that reading is a constant search for meaning which is influenced by each person's own idiosyncrasies, and to be most effective, it should produce a reader comprehension that is not only literal, but also interpretive and critical. Of course, we assume that the teacher should stimulate, foster, and guide the development of this literary competency in order to train a reader with all these abilities and that this should

be practiced from the early levels, that is to say, children's education, to be able to achieve this ambitious objective⁷.

Given all that we have been explaining, with children that have their own social and cultural backgrounds who are being taught to read, an instructor must approach interculturality in the classroom through literature. Thanks to literature it is possible to place yourself in the shoes, so to speak, of various characters from distinct times and places given a variety of circumstances. Literature offers the opportunity to be many different people, and to experience situations that otherwise might never be experienced. It places us in other worlds with distinct occurrences, where values or behaviour are complete opposites of that which an individual may know. Also, it is a great vehicle to find out how lives thousands of miles away may evolve and change, what the concerns of other societies are, the myths they hold or the realities of everyday life in that society, or even the lives of people just around the corner.

All of this allows the reader's thoughts to be externalized, whether they are an adult or child, so the debate the book brings up invites the reader not only to apply the text's message to their own reality, but also to be participants in their own interpretations. That is to say, they can relay the meaning they get from the text when related to their own personal experiences and previous knowledge to the rest of their friends and people around them. And this act, in turn, expresses their form of understanding and comprehending the text.

When dealing with the type of literature we have been talking about, the classroom can become a very enriching meeting point for ideas in educational institutions. Children, naturally, do not usually choose their friends for ethnic or cultural reasons; it tends to be society which influences them in this respect. To prevent them from growing up with prejudices, one must offer them a critical, yet respectful introduction to these other cultures that surround them. In this sense, Gremigner y Guiñazú (2006) suggest that the most natural way of arriving at this is for the multiculturally aware teacher to incorporate this respectful principle of cultural differences and interculturality in every classroom activity.

In books we can find examples of tolerance, coexistence, and the fostering of values. Publishing houses have reinforced this concept through the greater frequencies in which they release books whose contents clearly deal with intercultural education. Thanks to this we have children and young adult's literature for not only literary training, but also for bringing the theme of diversity to the classroom. As always, it is the instructor's task to select those books that offer the best quality in both aspects. For this, not only must the literary content be examined, but the illustrations that accompany it as well (and which are just as important at these ages). Of course the way in which these are reflected

in the existing societal diversity must be examined as well.

We are fortunate to have experts who have taken it upon themselves to recommend reference books to work with in the classroom. For example, Marco (2002) suggests *Rosa Caramelo* by Adela Turín and Nelia Bosnia, *Elmer* by David Mackee, *Oliver Button es una nena* by Tomi de Paola, *Billy y el vestido rosa* by Anne Fine and Philippe Dupasquier with a translation by Magdalena Ródenas, *Manuela* and *El gato de los ojos de color de oro* both by Marta Osorio, among others. In addition, *Sapo y Sepo* by Arnol Lobel, *Frederick* and *Nadarín* both by Leo Lionni, *El gentil dragón rojo* by Max Velthuijs, *Las travesuras de Julio* by Úrsula Wölfel, *La conejita Marcela* by Esther Tusquets suggested by Javier Flor Rebanal (2002). These titles deal with themes of sexual non-discrimination, unity, freedom, and the defense of the right to diversity.

On the other hand, there are more specific books that bring us closer to the world of minorities. Titles like *Cuentos judíos de la aldea de Chelo* from Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Trubloff, el ratón que quería tocar la balalaica* by John Burningham or *Hermano Cielo, Hermana Águila* by Susan Jeffers, can be good examples according to Javier Flor Rebanal (2002).

We shouldn't forget the collections of La Galera in collaboration with the Asociación de Maestros of Rosa Sensat titled "Yo vengo de " and "Yo soy de " Even though they are directed toward children eight years and older, the truth is that the photographs and images can spark interesting debate and wonder from early ages. The important part of these books is that the young protagonists themselves are the ones who explain their customs, their ways of life, their problems, etc which enables the communication to be more fluid and understandable for young readers.

Also, regarding this subject, we have the professor García Padrino (2005) who wrote a magnificent dissertation for the eighth Simposio de la Sociedad de Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura (Badajoz, 2003), in which he proposed a classification for children and young adult's Spanish literature that deals with the topic of interculturality and that we can now offer the reader:

- Works where diversity or cultural differences are presented as a resource for the setting of the story or conflict. For example, *La casa pintada* (1990) or *El bambú resiste la riada* (1996), both by Montserrat del Amo.
- Works which promote the knowledge of other cultures: *Cuentos nórdicos*, *Cuentos africanos*, *25 cuentos populares de Europa*, etc.
- Works that directly address the treatment of themes or conflicts linked to an intercultural problem: *El amigo Dwanga* (1992), by Rodrigo Rubio which deals with the issue of exploitation of workers without official papers in harsh environments; *Algún día, cuando pueda llevarte a Varsovia* (1997), by Lorenzo Silva, where immigrants live with natives of the country; *La reina de los mares* (2003), by Montserrat del Amo, the

story of the difficult and demanding journey to countries promising something more; *Vidas* (2005), by Mercé Rivas, where the author recreates the awful journey across the Straight of Gibraltar on rickety boats

Although we encourage the educator that reads this to consult and analyze these books to work with them in class, we would like to make another proposal. We hold the opinion that almost any book can meet this demand, provided that it is used with an open mind. If we assume that the teacher must work with a text, under the terms we have previously discussed, not only regarding literal comprehension, but also interpretive and critical comprehension in order for the students to establish a necessary interactive dialogue with the book (a complete reading of the text), we will then have the opportunity to tackle intercultural aspects in the classroom. We don't always have to fall back on books whose content has been developed for and because of interculturality. With near certainty, any text can be approached from that perspective; although the story's argument may not have multiculturalism as an overtone, the instructor can find a way to relate the content to cultural diversity in the pooling, debate or assembly from the reading. In other words, the instructor can relate the book to interculturality issues at the time of guiding the literal, interpretive or critical reading comprehension of the students. One thing is clear: the teacher cannot obviate the theme and the students cannot abstain from it. Or rather, when a story is selected based on certain criteria (as a resource for the topic being discussed in class, appropriate for the student's interests, with nice illustrations, an attractive theme, or a conducive format, etc.⁸) to be didactically read and analyzed, one must find how to relate it with and also take from it some aspect of interculturality.

We will present some examples that we find illustrative of what we have just explained that might serve as an orientation, or if they have picked the interest of our reader:

- *El sapo que no quería comer* (1998), written by Martha Sastrías and illustrated by Francisco Nava Bouchaín, presents us with the problem of the Toad King who, as a guest of the Turtle Kingdom, is pampered with the finest delicacies, yet he refuses to try them since they are not part of his typical diet. However, because of his shyness he is unable to admit this. This in turn, worries his host who looks for solutions or other substances to cure the Toad King's illness.
- It is a conducive story for working with children and teaching about the dietary differences that exist between people(s), differences that make us individuals and unique, but not incompatible, and that, in turn, can enrich our world.
- *Abuelo Tejón, ¿tú sabes hacerlo?* (2000), written by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Phan Leuyen, deals with the story of a grandfather and his grandson. The young boy thinks he can take on the world because he can do things his grandfather cannot and does not want to do. This shows that the grandfather is capable of caringly teaching his grandson many things learned with life experience, of course within caring relation between grandfather and grandson.

- Such a story lets us introduce the theme of family, its members, the genetic tree, searching for one's roots, as well as reflecting on the links that unite us with all this.
- *Mazapán* (1990), written by Marta Osorio and illustrated by Irene Bordoy, takes place at Christmas time (although it doesn't directly deal with this theme), a time of imagination, illusion, dreams, and love. We witness the friendship that arises between a boy and a marzipan figure that comes to life and follows the boy through his everyday life.
- This story inevitably leads us to discuss the celebration of holidays from different religions or cultures and their traditions. We can also compare them and see that there are more similarities than differences in such celebrations.
- *El Mausito* (1991), story by Lolo Rico and illustrations by José Ramón Sánchez, follows a little animal who is just born and needs to find out who he is. This problem of self-discovery is remedied as the little animal meets other forest animals and compares himself with them.
- The question of self-discovery is very important in early childhood where children's personalities are formed, so it is a good occasion to deepen this aspect of self-knowledge and the habits of one's cultural surroundings, and at the same time discover those of others.
- *Tragasueños* (2001), written by Michael Ende with illustrations by Annegert Fuchsbuster takes place in the country of Dormilandia where everyone sleeps, although the princess Dormilina cannot because she always has bad dreams. This affects her health and so her parents, very worried for her, beckon people from all sorts of lands, religions, and cultures in search of a solution.
- This story lets us talk, albeit in an indirect way, about natural and home remedies that are used on occasion in certain cultures to help with health issues.
- *Sopa de calabaza* (2001), whose writer and illustrator is Helen Cooper, shows us the relation between three friends (a squirrel, a duck, and a cat) that live together in perfect harmony because each of them perform their roles in the home until one of them breaks their role. Reestablishing the harmony is difficult, but all of them are willing to sacrifice for the friendship.
- The main message being worked with is how someone's selfish and capricious behavior can ruin the balance in a shared living environment, showing that respect for certain rules and for others is integral in any community or relationship.
- *Leo, el muñeco de nieve* (1989), written by Sylvia Loretan and illustrated by Jan Lenica, is about a doll made of snow named Leo. When the children that made him go to sleep, Leo finds himself lonely and he then listens to a little bird that just migrated south. The bird tells him of the marvels and warm lands where he came from and Leo begins to dream...

The presentation of two distinct locations can give us an opportunity to examine traditions of other lands, other countries different from our own, and their distinct climates.

- *El hombrecillo de papel* (1995), whose author and illustrator is Fernando Alonso, is an
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imaginative story whose protagonist is a little man made of newspaper created by a girl who was tired of all her toys. The little man comes to life and acquires autonomy. He then tries to make all the children around him happy and he goes in search of a way to do so.

This is a book full of symbols and good intentions. Through the protagonist of this text, a newspaper, and the reaction of the people given his news, we can work not only with “good news” referring to peace, coexistence, unity, etc... but we can also work with news referring to cultural events and expressions.

- *Un beso para osito* (1989), written by Else Holmelund Minarik and illustrated by Maurice Sendak, is the story of a baby bear that sends a drawing to his grandmother. His grandmother, in a show of affection, sends him back a kiss through a chain of animals that reach back to him.

This sweet story gives us an opportunity to work with, among other subjects and aspects, forms of loving expressions that can differ among cultures, the different connotations of kisses, the different contexts, etc...

Up to this point we have presented works of young adult and children’s literature which can be used to work with the topic of interculturality in childhood and primary education. But we would like to remind those who read this that in the corpus of literature not directed at children there are more works that breach and encourage the theme of cultural diversity or works that, at least following the same tendency put forth in this work, can be useful to stimulate debate and serve as a crossroads of ideas, if this is an aim. Establishing a parallel classification to that already put forth, we suggest:

- Classic works in which cultural differences are a primary theme. For example, *Matar a un ruiseñor* (1960), by Harper Lee, which was made into a marvelous screen adaptation by Robert Mulligan in 1962.
- More modern works where cultural conflict is a secondary theme set temporally in tumultuous eras, such as *Tomates verdes fritos* (1991), by Fannie Flagg, that has also been made into a movie, *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Jon Avnet, 1991)
- Works whose central theme is susceptible to being addressed from different cultural points of view, such as *Yerma*, by García Lorca which deals with female infertility⁹.
- More tragic works like *Quebdani. El cerco de la estirpe* (1997), by Antonio Abad.

Literary education in multicultural and multilingual contexts

Until this point, we have not talked about an additional aspect – with assiduity, cultural diversity is also a linguistic diversity. Are literature and literary education then useful in these situations? Undoubtedly, yes. Language and literature have always been related and there is a long didactic tradition in this sense, that dates back to ancient times; Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans were aware of the existence of different languages and the necessity of finding channels of communication, though this did not present

an insurmountable obstacle. Nonetheless, with a communicative focus on teaching languages, the role of literature was consigned to a secondary status, and even set aside altogether, given the belief that when presented with a text in a non-native language (whether it was a second language or a foreign language) there was such difficulty in its comprehension that it was a task doomed to failure.

We are of the opinion that literature is neither an elitist nor abstract entity, rather it gains meaning as an act of communication. From the didactic perspective, it ends up being an enriching resource of communicative competence, so, duly used, it teaches and broadens as well as perfects communicative abilities. As professor Mendoza affirms:

() La diversidad de recursos lingüísticos que muestran las producciones literarias es la base par amuchas propuestas que enriquecen la competencia comunicativa a través de la recepción de las creaciones escritas. (...) (2007:13).¹⁰

This same professor considers that literary discourse is supported by three semiotic codes; the first of them would be configured by the language system in question and the use of the same; this would lead to the second code formed by the literary use of the language, the literary text itself and the work as a system, working toward the third code of assigning cultural value to the literary work.

For Úcar (2008) literature as an expertly executed manifestation of language can also repair the lack, or deficiencies in the teaching-learning process through several functions: motivation, identification, reflection and interpretation. Regarding the first, it will allow meaning and content comprehension and recovery, recognition and recording of knowledge; regarding identification, occurrences will be acknowledged and come to be better known; with reflection experiences will be recreated and reconstructed and interpretation will allow for resolution and answering queries.

In this sense, the intensive and extensive reading activities are crucial, not only as natural and strategic means for understanding language, but also as circumstantial activities of oral support, complement or support for teaching that fosters intimacy for reading as well as the joy of reading about other languages and cultures.

We are aware of the impossibility of extensively addressing the topic at the moment, but we don't want to forego the opportunity to at least, outline it to bring to the reader's attention that it can be researched and used in a search for information about strategies that could facilitate text comprehension in the multilingual and multicultural classroom, and from this there are more and more authors that write about their experiences and what they have learned.

Other supporting material

For the instructor interested in what we have discussed, we recommend the frequent consultation of specialized magazines where one can find titles to work with in the classroom, as well as useful didactic guidelines about how to work with them. So, we recommend magazines such as: *Literatura e interculturalidad*; *Primeras Noticias de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (which is published every two years and concentrates on interculturality); *Lectura y Vida*; *CLIJ*; *Textos* from Editorial Graó, *Lenguaje y Textos* from the Sociedad de Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura, among others. This Society is also the locale for national and international conferences where a panel or board discusses the diffusion of topics related to interculturality and whose events are posted on their webpage. Of course, the magazines mentioned, in addition to being available in paper form, are also easily accessible on the internet.

And now that we have invited the reader to visit cyberspace, we also suggest that you explore those pages since the internet is such an effective tool for finding information regarding this topic. You might find, for example, visit the NCRCL (National Centre for Research in Children's Literature), an institution in the United Kingdom that fosters research in the realm of Children's Literature, on whose webpage (www.ncrcl.ac.uk) we can find a link to EPBC (European Picture Book Collection), www.ncrcl.ac.uk/epbc. This is about a project financed by the European Commission and headed by Doctor Penni Cotton¹¹, whose objective coincides with one of the most prevalent educational lines put in place by the European Union: the development of intercultural competency in the citizens of member nations. In this project, 15 member nations have participated in selecting an illustrated book that would meet certain requirements: that it reflects a universal theme of childhood, that it take place in a specific cultural environment unique to its country's culture, that it be narrated from a child's point of view, as well as that it be inspired by childhood experiences that those countries have in common and not those that separate them. From this, knowledge of other countries and cultures would be gained.

Final observations

Reading is a fundamental learning and an exceptional tool to organize the thoughts of human beings. As a social activity reading experiences are apt to be shared with others (which has been given the name of dialogue reading and shared reading); first with parents, later in pairs and with teachers, librarians, and everyone who wants to share in this situation.

Books invite reflection, inviting people to have a critical spirit, and make informed

aesthetic, political, personal, and civic judgments.

Why not use literature in the classroom to share our signs of identity, our culture?

Why not get to know others through it?

Why not use it to show and foster interculturality?

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Notes

- 1 The first contact with literature is found in the family environment; the role of the schools is not to take over, rather it is to share the responsibility of this fundamental task.
- 2 “(...) for the sake of reading, for an unbeatable love towards a book, for enjoying it for hours and hours (...)” (Translation of the author). Salinas, P. (1986). *Defensa de la lectura*. In *El defensor* (pp. 110-226). Madrid: Alianza.
- 3 We refer the interested reader to Molina García, M.J. (2009). La familia también anima a leer. In A.M. Rico Martín and others (Ed.) *Ámbitos para la dinamización de la lectura* (pp. 83-95). Granada: GEU.
- 4 “Education, indeed, is nothing else but a struggle, more than often grief-laden, for releasing students from their inner-self, their inner-world. It leads them towards a direct encounter with other worlds, other voices. It is in this far-distant and unknown territory where the true process of learning comes true. Learning encourages students *deepening* on the unnoticed and *being willing* to open themselves before others.” (Translation of the author).
- 5 “All it takes for a child –or an adult- to become a real reader is helping them finding out that reading books and writing as a habit are activities related to reading and world transformation, both of which might become strongly meaningful in their own lives. Hence, it does not make sense decomposing reading into its mechanical skills, as done in daily practice (...). When attention focuses on secondary aspects and not on text comprehension, the training of the reader becomes more difficult. Reading becomes a fragmented activity where the meaning and sense are taken off, the comprehension is hindered, and, *ipso facto*, the possibility of enjoying reading. Nothing is more convenient for the reader’s attention than reconstructing the comprehension of what is being read. The key to benefit from and enjoy reading is through understanding: adding meaning, feelings and reflection.” (Translation of the author)
- 6 “Having an interest for using literary materials is related to the growing pedagogic assessment of personal participation, implication, interaction and cooperation in every learning process.” (Translation of the author).
- 7 For those interested in consulting a didactic research proposal directed to this early stage of education, see Molina García, M.J. (2007). *Las habilidades de comprensión lectora en la etapa de Educación Infantil. Una propuesta de intervención didáctica*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.
- 8 Regarding these criterion, we direct the interested reader to Ricardo, M.A. (2006). Qué literatura para el alumnado de los primeros años. Un enfoque intercultural. *Primeras Noticias. Literatura Infantil y Juvenil*, 216, 83-92.
- 9 Regarding this topic and how to approach it in the classroom, see Molina García, M.J. (2002). Una propuesta didáctica para trabajar la comprensión lectora en un texto dramático de Federico García Lorca. *Primeras Noticias*, 181, 62-68.
- 10 “(...) The diversity of linguistic resources showing that literary production is the basis for many proposals enriching communicative skills through reception of written works (...)” (Translation of the author).
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