



Journal of Literary Education

Editorial

Good practices in Literary Education

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Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost "The Road Not Taken"

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.

C. P. Cavafy "Ithaka" (translated by Edmund Keeley)

This issue of the *Journal of Literary Education* is dedicated to Good Practices, i.e. case studies, methods, teaching practices and activities that have proven to be successful and useful for the teaching of literature and literary education in general. However, Good Practices are inextricably linked to the theory, theoretical developments and paradigm shifts that have shaped literary education as an academic subject. Thus, good practices reflect a shift in philosophy and teaching methodology in the teaching of literature, moving the teaching of literature away from the strict text-centered model. Literature teaching is now understood as a field of self-active learning and creation, experiential literary experience, active reading and making sense of the world of texts. The cultivation of literacy, aesthetic enjoyment, the effortless interaction of the student-reader with the text, multiple activations and student expressions are just some of the main axes of the good practices presented in the contributions of this special issue.

1. Finding the Loch-Ness monster

In a pioneering scientific article (Benton, 1984), Professor Michael Benton formulated key points for the renewal of the teaching methodology in literature. The themes developed by Benton are still relevant and continue to feed the wider debate that has been developing in recent years on key issues in the teaching of literature.

The author states that, for many years, teachers have been teaching literature by making use - in the best cases - of their innate wit, intuition and wellspring of enthusiasm. Although these personal qualities are important for lively and interesting teaching of the subject, they are hardly a solid basis for teaching in themselves; they need the support of a methodology. According to Benton (1984), the trend that offers real hope for change in the teaching methodology of literature is the 'theory of reception' or 'critique of reading response', as it is commonly called. Following the studies of the pioneering theorists of reading theory, Benton emphasizes that the reader plays a critical role in the creation of the literary experience and in the process of literary communication. The uniqueness of reading lies in two factors: the text and the reader. In the past, says Benton, the teaching of literature has given importance to the former and neglected the latter. The importance of emphasizing the reader is that teachers must consider the uniqueness of the student-reader's response to a literary text. This is the point from which the teaching of literature begins, and it requires a methodology which is not based on criticism and comprehension, but on reading and the reader's response. Research on this point can help. We need only ask: What happens when children read stories or poems? The emphasis on the student-reader's response enables teachers to focus on the

representations and cognitive strategies their students use when making sense of the literary text, thus priming the communicative climate of the teaching, but also shifting the focus from the textual (what the text says) to the factual stakes of the teaching (how the reader reads it).

Benton makes a main distinction between response as a mental process (what happens when we actually read) and the response that develops in the reader's mind after the reading process is over. He also distinguishes the initial, emergent response from the manifested or expressed (stated) response, which is manifested through the spoken and written word or through the visual expression of pupils. But in what ways can we reliably study the processes of reading response when we inevitably have to work with uncertain and inaccessible data? The reading response is hidden in the dark and very deep waters of the Loch Ness Lake.

The material that usually emerges when we ask our student readers to tell us what is going on in their minds during reading is uncertain, ambiguous and half-formed. Readers answer the question by activating a mental process, which, according to Benton, can be called introspective recall, inasmuch as this term emphasizes both the internal exploration in which the reader engages and the positive effort to recall and reconstruct his or her literary experience. Benton suggests the use of the ethnographic method in educational research to study student readers' responses to literary texts and stresses that it is advisable to focus on small groups of students (four to six of the same age), who can work individually, in pairs or as a group. Studying the reading response of a few individuals in depth leads to more reliable results than taming an unmeasured and chaotic amount of data. The emphasis therefore on empirical research is on actual student readers, the orientation of research to the responses of the student readers themselves (Benton et al. 1988; Frye, 1985; Miall, 2006) can only be combined with an emphasis on good practice, empirically tested instructional approaches of literary texts, which show us what works well in the classroom and what does not, or what could be improved.

2. The active literary classroom

The varied and imaginative teaching strategies and activities used in the teaching of literature, always in accordance with the ideological particularities of the literary text, seek to involve students and teachers in the game of literary reading, which is presented as an open and endless process, a means of individual expression and communication-collaboration with fellow students-readers. In particular, the activities, whether individual or in groups, are playful in nature, leading students to produce oral or written language, but mainly activating

them in the direction of diverse artistic expression - literary, artistic, musical, theatrical. The activities highlight the polyphonic character of the literary text and relieve the teacher and the pupils from the stress of searching for a correct or formal answer.

The activities serve multiple objectives: reconstruction of textual reality and consolidation of plot structure, critical approach to the structural components of the text (setting, characters, theme, plot), exercise in poetic expression and familiarization with open poetic language, synthesis and cultivation of oral and written language, familiarity with fictional writing and the arts, activation of the imagination through multiple journeys in space and time, cultivation of cognitive and metacognitive skills, etc. All students participate equally in the learning experience within the classroom reading community according to their aptitudes, abilities and needs. The teacher's role is particularly important in inspiring in students a desire to take "the road not taken" and cultivating their willingness to actively engage in literary reading and activities. Through good practice and investment in student-centered forms of teaching, the road seldom taken can become a well-worn path. But to achieve this, the teacher must invest both in their training and their creativity, their desire to lift the veil of habit, of teaching rut and barren, formalistic teaching.

We are undoubtedly living in a bleak, challenging time. Resistance to crises and the various daily barbarities has always been and still is an investment in education, Odysseus' journey to Ithaca on the sacred and virtuous raft of *knowledge*. In this journey full of charm and adventure, the teacher has the role of navigator: their mission is to help the pupil to cultivate through literature, to emancipate themselves and to contemplate the world with a contemplative eye. The emphasis on good practices strikes at the heart of the literature teacher's mission, at the heart of *teaching*, which, in its indissoluble congruence with *learning* - means helping the student to construct knowledge through experience, discovery and adventure; helping them to develop self-consciousness, breadth of mind and new codes of understanding the world, elements that will imbue tomorrow's adult citizen and shape their personality. Good practices in literary education and teaching can therefore invigorate and significantly improve both teaching and learning. The teacher quickly realizes that their role in the classroom, even in the midst of the larger, unforgiving and grim social reality, can become more creative, more supportive of their students' learning. Their imagination, flexibility, well-meaning ability to improvise, and their readiness will help them gain the trust and interest of their students and at the same time reap all the joy and satisfaction that the art of teaching can offer. The suggestions presented in this issue may remind us in a valid as well as charming way of a fundamental condition of teaching: *that the object of learning, even*

if not attractive in itself, must be presented in an attractive way. Only in this way will the interest and active participation of students at all levels of education be won over, and the literary classroom be transformed into *a voyage full of adventure, full of discovery.*

3. Articles

All articles included in this issue reflect different and unique approaches to the topic of Good Practices and are based on in-depth as well as detailed research by their authors.

In Dalila Forni's article *Literature for self-discovery. Looking into adolescence through graphic novels*, the genre of graphic novel for children and young adults is analyzed. Some selected works are compared and literary strategies for adolescents are further discussed.

Maren Conrad, Magdalena Michalak and Evelina Winter, in their *A Case Study on interactive wordless picture books and their potentials within a multilingual classroom*, focus on how the book can be used for literary-aesthetic and linguistic promotion within heterogeneous classes via an innovative form of multimodal storytelling, taking as an example the wordless picture book *Was ist denn hier passiert?(What happened here?)* illustrated by Neuhaus & Penzek (2015).

In the article *Reception of comics revisited. A revision of gender-based reading practices at school*, Carolin Führer discusses gender constructions and authorship in comics and/or exploring new non-binary reading education paths that adequately consider the hybrid mediality of comics and the segment's recent developments on the market.

María Pareja Olcina, in her article *Development education: socio-affective learning in the Language and Literature classroom*, presents an experience in the subject of Spanish Language and Literature. Via her methodological proposal, she wants to explore other pedagogical possibilities for secondary school teachers to teach through active participation.

Mike John Panayiota and Tasoula Tsilimeni, in *Developing children's critical thinking through wordless book*, discuss how wordless books can be used within the classroom by small groups of students or individual students in order to develop their critical thinking skills and to expand their vocabulary.

In the monograph by Leonor Ruiz-Guerrero, Beatriz Hoster-Cabo & Sebastián Molina-Puche, *Lectura dialógica de álbumes ilustrados para fomentar el pensamiento crítico: un enfoque para Educación Primaria*, an approach for dialogic reading is proposed, via a qualitative

methodology and an evaluative research in three phases, out of which, the results of the third are discussed.

In the Miscellaneous section, Mary Dimaki-Zora's & Thomai Gkerlektsi's *Applied Theatre in Greece: Skipping from Crisis to Crisis* deeply explores the emergence of applied and online theatre in Greece through Greek literature as well as three case studies of applied theatre, linked to the post-pandemic era in times of social, political and economic adversity.

Also, in the Miscellaneous section, Anastasia Oikonomidou's & Anastasia Karagianni's article *Printed hyper-texts in the Greek literature for children. Breaking the canon and creating a new type of implied reader: the case of Eugene Trivizas* highlights two ground-breaking books for young readers by the Greek author Trivizas within a framework of the multimedia world and hyper-texts, expanding on how reading can be viewed as a game.

4. References

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