

Review of *Compelling stories for English language learners: Creativity, interculturality, critical literacy*, written by Janice Bland (2022). Bloomsbury Publishing, 356 pp. ISBN 978-1-350-18999-7.

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English as a foreign language (EFL) education has faced some struggles with the lack of appropriate teaching materials for developing global citizenship (Wang et al., 2023). To support teachers and language learners with suitable teaching and learning materials, Janice Bland has selected a few children's literary narratives and proposed a deep reading framework in her book *Compelling stories for English language learners: creativity, interculturality, critical literacy*.

The volume is organized into five parts: introduction and definitions of key concepts and deep reading framework (Chapters 1-3), improving interculturality by visual literacy (Chapters 4-6), improving creativity by literature (Chapters 7-9), improving critical literacy with reflection of global issues (Chapter 10-11) and glossary of key terms. This volume aims to reveal the educational potential of literary narratives in language education and support literary engagement in EFL education, specifically by improving language skills, creativity, interculturality, and critical literacy. Combined with the literary narratives, the deep reading framework proposed in this volume constitutes a unique and original contribution to the field.

Part 1 introduces the key concepts in this book, such as literary apprenticeship, interculturality, multiple literacies, deep reading, in-depth learning, children's literature, and language learning. The multiple literacies are functional, visual, literary, information, media, and critical literacy. The author argues that children's literature is qualified as a high-quality input to improve multiple literacies and meet the needs of the current situation of language education. She moves on to explain that deep reading framework is the method to use children's literature in language education.

Based on the main issues addressed in Part 1, I believe that the deep reading framework is helpful and practical for teachers to guide students in exploring literary texts through deep reading. The framework includes four steps: unpuzzle and explore, activate and investigate, critically engage, and experiment with a creative response. The four steps can help students have a general understanding of the story and the linguistic information first, and then relate to the issues in reality words and share the understanding of characters and plots. Students are also encouraged to relate to personal experiences and exercise critical literacy, and finally share their responses by creative activities in classrooms, such as creative writing, drama, art, film, and music. The last two steps consider providing suggested activities to connect the story world with global issues in the world outside of schools, which

is important for improving multiple literacies.

In Part 2, Bland illustrates the benefits of using picture books as visual literacy in language teaching for children (Chapter 4). Picture books discussing social and environmental justice are used for improving interculturality. In Chapter 5, refugee stories are used to discuss the inclusivity problem in citizenship education in English language education. According to the author, refugee stories in picture books can develop long-lasting thoughtful feelings and flexible perspectives which are important in cognitive development when developing intercultural competence. The deep reading framework is employed to analyse refugee stories and organize many innovative classroom activities such as restructuring the poems, writing lyrics and melodies to create their song based on the poems, collecting, and comparing the emotions of the characters. In Chapter 6, graphic novels are used for developing empathy, imagination, and creative literary response in language education.

Part 3 illustrates the potential of creative writing, plays and verse novels in developing elementary students' creativity following the deep reading framework. In Chapter 7, the author encourages teachers to create what the author calls "mentor texts" of creative writing (an example of writing). These suggested mentor texts include various genres (poems, chapter books, letters, emails, etc.) with rhyme, rhythm, and rap to improve creative literary engagement in language classrooms. In Chapter 8, the deep reading framework becomes a guide to use scripted and unscripted drama to motivate creativity among teenage language learners. Chapter 9 introduces how to use verse novels to improve interculturality and creativity in language education as the episodic structure of verse novels leaves gaps for students' responses and imagination in deep reading. The activities suggested in the deep reading framework invite students to connect the perspectives in the story world with issues in the contemporary world and compare different voices in stories and students' perspectives for intercultural learning.

Part 4 provides suggestions for integrating critical literacy in language education through children's literature. In Chapter 10, the author suggests that children's literature involved with local and global issues is beneficial for improving students' critical literacy in different cultural contexts. These issues are mental well-being in adolescence, gender expression, poverty and inequality in social class, ethnocentrism, and prejudice (xenophobia) and environmentalism. Moreover, speculative fiction can provide fresh and creative perspectives and opportunities for critical thinking about global issues in the real world through the allegorical representation of the problems in the story world (Chapter 11). For example, *Animal Farm* and *The Hunger Games* reflect the issues about the cult of personality in political development, related world events and texts, manipulation, violation of human rights, the white saviour, consumerism, and celebrity culture. The author highlights that speculative fiction can engender different options and act with foresight for high school students.

The current volume provides a theoretically grounded and methodologically sound account of the educational values of literary narratives in language education. The book also illustrates an in-depth and detailed deep reading framework of how to engage literary narratives with different genres in different stages in language education. Combined with the deep reading framework, the suggested narratives and activities support teachers to involve students in critically connecting the story world with global issues in the real world. However, the author could have considered some contextual factors when practising the deep reading framework with literature in classrooms. Although genres, topics, and students' different education stages are taken into account, different students' language levels in one classroom could impact the effectiveness and involvement of activities in deep reading. The author points out the importance of unscripted drama in motivating creativity, which could be

challenging for second language learners whose productive language level is not advanced. Learners' creativity could be limited by their speaking skills. Thus, it may be necessary to provide semi-structured scripts for students and make the classroom more inclusive for students at different language levels. Additionally, it is worth exploring the potential benefits of the framework for teachers. I would be interested to know whether any research has been carried out on the utility or efficacy of the framework.

In sum, this volume is a timely contribution to revealing the educational benefits of children's literary narratives in language education. The guidance based on the deep reading framework suggests different kinds of activities which are inspirational for teachers to implement the literary stories in their contextual classrooms. Yet, teachers' creative agencies are needed to take care of students' different language levels when conducting the activities. I believe this publication would be beneficial for language teachers for teaching practice, teacher educators for professional training and scholars for future research.

Reference

- Bland, J. (2022). *Compelling stories for English language learners: Creativity, interculturality and critical literacy*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
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