

# THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN L1 EDUCATION: SIX FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

## INTRODUCTION

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Collaboration between the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education (IAIMTE) and the Education Department of the University of Toulouse II has existed for several years now. Such collaboration has resulted in a desire for face to face contact: the IAIMTE was intent on increasing its French audience, while the French team was able to grasp the opportunity to exchange their French-speaking studies in a broad international context. Thus, the IAIMTE requested the team from Toulouse organise the fifth conference in France (Albi) in 2005. For this conference, we invited specialists from French-speaking countries to present their research and reflections on the role of literature both inside and outside school. This issue presents the corresponding papers.

First, several authors examine the nature and place of youth literature, as well as reading habits from early childhood to adulthood. *Jean Perrot* points to contemporary literary trends, considering the extraordinary development, both qualitative and quantitative, of publishing for youth over the last twenty years that he explains pri-

1

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marily by the equilibrium between the texts proposed by publishers and the young public's expectations. Focusing on the notion of play, through artistic creation and themes relevant to children, literary professionals have got closer to the "soul" of children, and now seek to feed their imagination. Perrot evokes the consequences of these editorial choices on the construction of the child's personality, as regards their initiation of the senses, language awareness, openness towards abstraction and exchanges with adults. This notion of sharing is questioned by *Monique Sénéchal*. She presents empirical data (from experimental, correlational and intervention research) relating to the influence of early home literacy practices on later school achievement, especially on children's oral language skills and the acquisition of reading. Her findings invite us to think with a more subtle regard about the short-term and long-term effects of shared book experiences. Two contributions conclude this panorama by presenting results from investigations. *Christine Barré-De Miniac* first locates teenagers' reading practices among their other cultural practices. She then distinguishes reading in general from literary reading. Young people's reading and writing practices are also compared to the role currently played by the Internet and new technologies, to examine in what ways they complement or oppose each other. *Nicole Robine* then shows that young people's reading practices are at the crossroads of social and cultural mediation in which school and the family share the primary role. Indeed, Robine notes that the separation of school reading and leisure reading traditionally made in research no longer corresponds to reality. She highlights the complex personal and social relationships in the construction of the stance of the reader.

The two final contributions focus more specifically on the use of the youth literature in class, for the purposes of teaching reading and writing. Although school may be the place where children meet literature, school does not necessarily provide children with the ability to read literary texts nor with the 'taste for reading'. Merely being exposed to literary writing does not suggest what the learner may be doing. The appreciation and study of a literary work is an active and constructive process which engages the learner on an affective and emotional level as well as an intellectual and cognitive one. This learning process is possible through the adult who accompanies the child in a process of building up meaning, in a dialogue to negotiate meaning and values. The roads leading to this process are not clear for pupils nor for teachers. One of the difficulties of using children's literature in class is a consequence of centring on the textual object and the place which understanding and recreating the content of the story occupies. These often take a disproportionate importance with regard to the intended aim to develop the reader's aesthetic and critical judgment. The didactic challenge is therefore to provide intellectual and methodological tools which will allow pupils to construct the meaning(s) of the text, but also be able to invest in the meeting between texts that are being offered to them, to make exchanges, to debate and to confront their points of view.

In this perspective, *Bernard Devanne* presents an instructional approach to youth literature, which he has carried out for twenty-five years in collaboration with primary teachers. This approach to teaching reading and writing aims to support the emergence of cultural attitudes towards literary works through intertextuality, in

articulation with continuous and diversified writing activities. Lastly, *Serge Terwagne* evokes first learning experiences in nursery school. He illustrates various didactic approaches, presents the theoretical models to which they are related and confronts them with the contemporary literature on offer. The level of quality reached by this new literature makes it possible to go beyond simple aspects of narrative comprehension to reach symbolic and aesthetic dimensions. To approach these books with young pupils, it is necessary to reconsider storybook reading. Terwagne proposes this through various didactic approaches.

Laurence Pasa, convener of the 5<sup>th</sup> IAIMTE conference in Albi, France, July 2005.

#### AUTHOR INFORMATION

Christine Barré-De Miniac is professor at the Teacher Training College of Grenoble (Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres de Grenoble), co-director of LIDILEM (Linguistique et didactique des langues étrangères et maternelles) at the University Stendhal (Grenoble III) and president of l'AIRDF (Association Internationale pour la Recherche en Didactique du Français).

Bernard Devanne is professor at the Teacher Training College of Normandy (Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres de Normandie).

Jean Perrot is professor of comparative literature. He worked for a long time in the department of Play Sciences at the University Paris 13. He is the founder of the International Institute Charles Perrault.

Nicole Robine is professor in literature and human sciences. She is a member of the Medias Studies Center at the University Michel de Montaigne (Bordeaux III) and specialist of reading sociology.

Monique Sénéchal is professor of psychology at Carleton University (Canada).

Serge Terwagne is professor of Didactics of Language Arts at the "Haute Ecole Albert Jacquard" of Namur, Educational Department (Elementary Teacher Training College). He is president of the Belgian Francophone Reading Association and member of the IDEC (International Development in Europe Committee of the International Reading Association).