Thinking through Children’s Literature in the Classroom
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There can be no more important part of education than developing in young children the enjoyment of reading.

Reading is their own window on the world: it is more individual and personal than any computer game or TV programme. Reading stimulates imagination, empathy, and awareness. Reading gives them the early opportunity to develop the most significant elements of language awareness, text awareness and cultural awareness, whatever language in which they are reading.

This is all obvious, and should really not need to be stated again and again.

But a volume like this one, and the conference from which it originates, are vitally necessary in a world that is rapidly becoming less interested in books and reading.

Even teachers themselves, whose job it should be to promote reading and develop their pupils’ language skills, as well as the parents who should read with their children and provide books from the earliest possible age, are today often culpable in the lack of time devoted to this most essential of activities. Most say they just don’t have time for reading.

The novelist Hilary Mantel has commented, “I am intrigued by the divide between those people who say ‘I haven’t time to read’, and those for whom reading is like breathing and who, though they may be caught up with all sorts of texts, always have a novel on the go. For some people, the consumption of stories is a barely conscious function that runs parallel to eating, sleeping, having sex, and earning a living. How do you live life without stories—live in just a single narrative, and that one your own? Show me a man—it’s usually a man—who ‘doesn’t see the point of fiction’, and I’ll show you a pompous, inflexible self-absorbed bore. The
people with no time to read play computer games and watch TV.” (In The Guardian, 2 August 2008)

We certainly want our children to be computer literate, to read online, and to engage imaginatively and intellectually with what the internet can give them. But do we really want our children to grow up without imagination, without the empathy with other lives, the awareness of what languages and texts can do, the sense of cultures outside their own, all these things that books can do beyond the computer screen?

Children respond to visual stimuli long before they have any awareness of language. Those wonderful books that very young children can play with in the bath are a great way to introduce them to the visual stimuli of images, and to the sheer joy of discovery in turning over the pages and finding the image has changed—this is the very easy first step into stories. And stories are vital. In many ways every society lives by, with, and from stories. They are how we frame experience, how we represent our realities, how we cope with the ongoing narratives that surround us.

Visual texts were among humanity’s first ways of setting down or illustrating concepts, of representing something by something, of telling a story, of an addresser speaking to an addressee who was then expected to “read” the text, the drawing, the cave painting, whatever it was.

Children’s books have to start with visual stimuli and gradually increase the verbal components—again this is obvious. It is interesting that, despite the recession, in several countries children’s book publishing is enjoying great success, partly in the wake of the phenomenon of Harry Potter, which attracted millions of young people to reading.

The present volume addresses a range of issues, both theoretical and practical, around children’s reading and education. From wider theoretical questions exploring the boundaries of teaching, education and children’s literature, it moves to interdisciplinary approaches, adducing imaginative writing as the perfect resource for students to gain literary competence and develop their cognitive ability to think critically. The contributions then take us into the classroom in practical hands-on ways, bringing reading and foreign language teaching together, and finally spread out to a wider social and cultural context, linking children’s literature and other spheres of culture.

It is in this context that we have to remind ourselves that for our present purposes the focus is pedagogic. We are teaching language and teaching reading. Often the context is second or foreign language learning (but by no means exclusively—the principles apply to all reading, in all language learning contexts). We are also teaching literature, with both a
small and a capital L, and it is a basic premise of this book that these two “sides” of literature study are interdependent, inseparable, and united at every point by the language of the text. Literature study without language awareness is now widely seen as inappropriate, if not anathema.

Fundamentally text is text, and the first thing we have to do is read the text. What we do with it thereafter and where we take the level of study—critical, theoretical, linguistic, cultural, historical, contextual, socio-political—will in each case involve specialist skills and approaches. This is not to diminish, but rather to enhance, the enormous contribution of educators handling first principles—the youngest level of learning has too often been undervalued, but it is where the most basically important steps have to be taken, and it is where educators have the greatest responsibility.

One of many developments in the scientific study of language over the last two decades has been a growing emphasis on human creativity in language, with a focus on our capacity to use languages, to think beyond limited ranges, to exploit the vast range of human words to make an infinite number of sentences and discourses. Children are infinitely creative in many ways, including with language. All too often the educational system stifles that creativity. Reading can open it up.

In our educational context the development of the fifth skill, the thinking skill, and the acquisition of processing skills for all kinds of visual and verbal texts, involves a refining of three levels of awareness in cognitive terms:

language awareness
text awareness
cultural awareness

The language can be verbal or visual, or indeed of any other type from music to geological strata; similarly the text can be of any type: song or story, poem or play; cultural awareness is where the reader comes into his or her own—the reader can intervene, mentally, emotionally, visually, verbally, textually: processing at any of these stages and in any of these ways.

The fifth skill is in itself nothing new: it effectively embodies the three ways of learning language outlined by Michael Halliday in *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978) and other writings, when he suggested that a three-part structure is needed for discussions of language learning:
The most innovative textbooks and the best educational practice over recent years have implicitly been incorporating materials which require interpretation and thinking skills, and which expand cultural awareness as well as developing the four traditional basic language skills. The best of these materials incorporate a range of visual stimuli of all kinds, from picture stories to short poems, to advertisements, to songs, to longer prose—all kinds of imaginative texts are usable in the classroom.

What is to be learned is twofold: the mechanisms of the syntax of the target language are a more or less closed system, with not too many variables, a system of syntax which has more or less clear rules of use and usage. Then there is the much more open system of lexis and register, which necessarily involves choice on the part of the producer of the language and a capacity to evaluate and respond to that series of choices on the part of the receiver.

Starting with visual texts opens up these areas, which can be explored more and more deeply as the reader acquires greater familiarity with either the target language (in a foreign language learning context) or of ways of handling the first language and the critical and analytical terminology appropriate to the learning environment.

The factors which condition such text choices are of course manifold: they are social, cultural, linguistic, ideological, historical, local, personal, affective, and can indeed be as idiosyncratic as the individual speaker.

Communicative language teaching and learning have, all too often, avoided deep consideration of these factors, in a justifiable attempt to streamline the learning to what is quantifiable and what can be standardised. But a volume like this one serves a vitally important function in making educational practitioners all over Europe reflect on their own practices, and on what needs to be done at all levels, from the institutional level to the level of family: from syllabus design to parents reading to their children at bedtime.

Schools, and homes, need books. We must not let financial stringency kill our libraries and our learners’ access to books. The resources are infinite, from the grim tales of the Brothers Grimm to the magic worlds of Tolkien and J. K. Rowling. I remember personally hating many of the Grimm stories as a child—this might have been the first stage in the development of a critical sensibility! Teachers should encourage students to make their own decisions about texts, to prefer one to another, to
evaluate them in terms of enjoyment, excitement, interest. There is no
greater recommendation for a book than another person’s having enjoyed
it: that can become a lively part of classroom reading reaction and
response.

So, after all that—what to read?

The best answer is: *anything*. By encouraging children to read, and to
make their own reading choices and preferences, the range of texts they
read will expand exponentially, moving on, every reader at his or her own
pace, from the simplest texts, to wherever the magic takes them.

An early form of children’s text is of course nursery rhymes and
stories—*Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is still one of the best. And it can
lead straight to other ‘bear’ stories, from the wonderful *Go to Sleep, Little
Bear* (Jan Mogensen), through Martin Waddell’s lovely Little Bear series
(which includes one with a very similar title, *Can’t You Sleep, Little Bear*),
to classics like *Winnie the Pooh* (A. A. Milne), and *The Bear That Went
Over the Mountain* by William Kotzwinkle, and on to the very recent 2013
prize winner and instant classic, *A Boy and Bear in a Boat* by Dave
Shelton.

Is there any parent or teacher who would actively deny their children
the joy of reading books such as these? After these, the whole wonderful
world of reading opens up… and should never end.
INTRODUCTION

AGUSTÍN REYES-TORRES,
LUIS S. VILLACAÑAS-DE-CASTRO
AND BETLEM SOLER-PARDO

A man who does not think for himself does not think at all.
—Oscar Wilde

Stories are the most important thing in the world.
Without stories we wouldn’t be human beings at all.
—Philip Pullman

This book is the result of understanding literature as a central part of children’s education. Young learners require opportunities to explore books emotionally and intellectually. In essence, this is what drives them to achieve a significant level of literary engagement, that is, to develop their ability to move from language users to fluent comprehensive readers, and most importantly, to read for pleasure and think critically. Fiction and nonfiction literary works constitute in this way a source to open young minds and to help them understand how and why people—themselves included—live as they do, or to question through critical lenses whether they could live otherwise. By integrating philological, cultural, and pedagogical inquiries, Thinking through children’s literature in the classroom approaches the use of literature as a crucial factor to motivate students not only to improve their literacy skills but also to develop their literary competence, one that prepares them to produce independent and sensible interpretations of the world, of the many planes of reality of which their life consists. To this aim, we have gathered a selection of authors that we hope will afford the reader an opportunity to reflect on
which are the general expectations and social demands for teachers and students, and how children’s literature can help to analyze and realize them within a wide range of classroom contexts. Of course, the endeavor of forming young readers and fostering their ability to think begins primarily by having well-read teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching and, secondly, by having students who are willing to learn. Operating both on a theoretical and a practical level, we conceive the role of the teacher as a mediator and initiator of selected contents and readings that facilitate learning and illustrate their knowledge base and expertise. But this role must include being a dialogic partner who is willing to accompany the student on a journey that may end up transforming both. Students must become active learners by means of guided and focused reflection of the literary texts that they read in order to construct their own knowledge. To encourage and sustain them through the critical turns of their own thinking processes, educators must surely display a sound pedagogic knowledge apart from deep literary expertise.

This volume attempts to unfold this balance between critical thought, aesthetic enjoyment and pedagogical awareness. It is structured into five sections that contain a total of twelve chapters. Section One is titled *Thinking theoretically* and it includes two texts that explore and plot the boundaries of teaching, education and children’s literature in novel ways. Chapter One, by Luis S. Villacañas-de-Castro, is ‘An “Education to Reality”. An Interdisciplinary Framework for Teaching Literature in the Classroom.’ This chapter presents an interdisciplinary framework for teaching literature capable of disclosing the real determinations that might affect a literary work. Inspired by Marx’s method as much as by an expression originally coined by Sigmund Freud, this interdisciplinary framework is presented as part of an “education to reality” project, the main aims of which are not distinct from those adopted by several critical and transformative pedagogical approaches. According to the author, from this angle, teaching literature in the classroom would not only give students the chance to enjoy literary works; it would also contribute to providing them with conceptual tools that help them understand, criticize, and finally transform those realities that affect their lives most significantly in ways so complex that they usually remain completely ignorant of them.

In Chapter Two, ‘Exploring Education and Children’s Literature,’ Xavier Minguez presents a discussion on how children’s literature and education have always kept a close relationship, in the sense that every child is inscribed in a process of development and every aspect of his/her life brings consequences into his/her formation. On this note, the chapter
believes it is significant that since the 19th century the most relevant literary works for children have tried to avoid the kind of moral didacticism that was customary until this time. Other questions are posed: What is the real educational content of contemporary children’s literature? Is it possible to exclude an educational component from this kind of literature? Mínguez answers these questions by examining the educational issues of children’s literature, especially its contribution to the development of literary competence.

The next section in the book is Thinking Literary Competence and includes two Chapters by Agustín Reyes-Torres and Josep Ballester in which the notion of literary competence is reworked and reconsidered as one of the main goals of education in the 21st Century. Children’s literature is conceived here as the perfect resource for students to gain literary competence and develop their cognitive ability to think critically about the present. In Chapter Three, ‘Literacy Education: the First Step towards Literary Competence,’ Reyes-Torres introduces literary competence as the education based on the development of literacy skills and presents this concept as a key component to incorporate the contents that currently match the standards of education. Combining both 21st century Skills and educational literacy may prove to be the best way to design a literary competence-based curriculum that enables students to control and take charge of the cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions of written and spoken language in an effective way. Similarly, in Chapter Four, ‘What does reading, literary and intercultural education mean?’, Ballester provides a reflection on how literature represents an interdisciplinary framework through which multiple educational levels are displayed. For him, literature embodies a space for learning through the voices of the different characters and cultures depicted, but also from its most significant silences and absences.

To continue, Section Three, Thinking Teaching Practice, comprises contributions in which practical, original uses of children’s literature in a wide variety of classroom contexts are analyzed and illustrated through insightful activities. Björn Sundmark, in Chapter Five, presents “Dragons Be Here”: Teaching Children’s Literature and Creative Writing with the Help of Maps. According to the author, 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, and also provide a basic plot summary by indexing the main events of the storyline in different ways. Both of these map functions facilitate language comprehension and literature appreciation. Thus, this chapter attempts at developing a tentative topology of maps in children’s books with examples from,
among others, Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, and Jansson’s *Moomin*-books. Finally, it also illustrates how map-making can be used as a tool for creative writing. On the contrary, Maria Luisa Alonso’s chapter, ‘Learning English through children’s poetry,’ chooses children’s poetry as its subject matter to carefully explore its educational potential. Interestingly, the author dwells on the properties associated to children’s poetry, and resorts to theoretical arguments and practical example to show that all the characteristics that render this kind of poetry ambiguous or problematic from the point of view of a rigid literary canon actually make children’s poetry an ideal pedagogic resource, a truly essential device for the classroom.

In the fourth section of the book, *Thinking Children’s Literature in the EFL Classroom*, we offer three chapters that address the challenge of integrating children’s literature in the specific setting of foreign language education. In Chapter Seven, ‘The Role of Young Adult Literature in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language,’ Elena Ortells argues for a wide range of educational possibilities that justify the inclusion of literature (particularly Young Adult Literature) as part of the curriculum of EFL in Spanish schools. In spite of the references to literature in the English language curriculum of the different courses of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate, reality in the classroom shows that literature is relegated to a nearly non-presence. Ortells concludes that the future for literature in secondary school resides in meeting the challenges posed by new generations of students, and that what is really necessary is a radical rethinking of the subject. Guided by the same spirit, Rowena Coles’ chapter, ‘Oscar Wilde for teachers and pupils: a model for teaching EFL to young learners,’ focuses on earlier education levels. Her text is inspired by the belief that teachers can gain great benefit from a linguistic analysis of acclaimed literature both from the viewpoint of their personal enrichment as well as their professional preparation, but also by the conviction that stories are indeed an invaluable tool for teaching English as a foreign language from a very early age. The chapter then presents the different steps of a project whereby Oscar Wilde’s story ‘The Selfish Giant’ was first analysed by university students, transposed in a form accessible to primary school and kindergarten children, and finally taken into the classroom, through a number of engaging activities.

Included in the same section is Chapter Nine, ‘Negotiating Miranda’s vision in the classroom: Critical Encounters with Literature, From Archetypal Symbolism to Dystopian Fantasy,’ by Tzina Kalogirou and Konstantinos Malafantis. The authors use the theoretical tools of critic
pedagogy with university-level students (training to become primary
teachers) to help them become acclimated to the world of literature, to
move beyond their own assumptions or judgments about others, and to
read more deeply the literature that engages them. In order to achieve
these goals, they were encouraged to become critically conscious readers
by connecting and reading comparatively different literary genres situating
them into its discursive contexts. The chapter proves how this approach
generated a literature learning that was meaningful and authentic, capable
of creating a community of readers in possession of the skills necessary to
respond effectively to a variety of demanding and thought-provoking
literary texts.

Finally, the last section of the volume, Thinking Children’s Literature
in Society, draws connections between children’s literature and other
spheres of culture. Gemma Lluch, in particular, presents in Chapter Ten
‘The worlds of fiction of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, George’s
Marvellous Medicine, Harry Potter and The Hunger Games in Catalan.’
She reports on what happens when relevant books for children
and young adults in English reach the literary trail in Catalan: how they
adapt, what they represent, and what changes they create in the target
culture. In order to conduct her study, she has selected four key novels
(mentioned in the title) that are already considered a part of the history of
children’s literature. In this regard, it is significant that all four of them
have gone beyond the limits of one language and one culture and that
today they constitute a model of four key moments in literature for
children and young readers. Some of the questions to which this chapter
roused attention are the following: What happens to these books when they
are taken from one culture and put into another? How does the target
culture receive them? Where is their place and in which trail do they
work?

Chapter Eleven presents ‘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 and
Beatriz Martin. This contribution deals with one of the most popular fairy
tales from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Snow White. Taking the brothers
Grimm’s story as a reference, the authors have created a series of activities
for secondary school students that rely upon the study of two films based
on this classic fairy tale: Rupert Sanders’ Snow White and the Huntsman,
and Pablo Berger’s Blancanieves. The aim is to present these two films in
order to design educational guidance for secondary school teachers and
use it as a pedagogical tool for teaching EFL for the Spanish Baccalaureate.
To achieve this goal, two phases are proposed: a first phase in which
students will work individually and, a second phase in which students will
work in groups. In addition—and on a more global level—the use of ICTs
competences will be incorporated to accomplish better results.

To conclude, Chapter Twelve focuses on the use of literary readings
that come from the oral tradition and that can be used as a learning tool to
teach a foreign language in primary school, but also to discuss other social
and controversial issues. In her work “And her Step-Mother organized
the Wedding”: How Violence and Inequalities in the Grimms’
Collection Can Foster Social Integrative Behaviours in Children,”
María Alcantud Díaz discusses how some of the tales of the brothers
Grimm such as Snow-White or Rapunzel can cope with the educational,
social and practical dimensions embedded in some of the key competences
for lifelong learning, as suggested by the European Union. Particularly, the
author touches on the interpersonal, intercultural, and civic competencies
connected to additional integrative social traits, such as gender equalities
and new family structures.

By including the work of scholars based in Spain, Sweden, England,
Italy, and Greece, Thinking through Children’s Literature in the
Classroom exemplifies a fully European project, which we hope is of
interest to the common or academic reader who wishes to become
acquainted with the major trends and innovations that characterize this
field of study. In addition, it will surely be useful to teacher-trainees or
current teachers who want to learn how to successfully implement
children’s literature in the classroom, as well as how to foster and develop
their students’ critical thinking skills through literature with pedagogic
awareness. The editors of the volume have included such variety of
standpoints and perspectives in the hope of materializing thus the full
potential that is set off when children’s literature is pushed to the very
center of the educational endeavor—a goal shared in all twelve chapters
included in this book.
PART I

THINKING THEORETICALLY
CHAPTER ONE
AN ‘EDUCATION TO REALITY’: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM
LUIS S. VILLACAÑAS-DE-CASTRO

Problematic subject matters

One need not go too far, nor delve too deep, into any curriculum before discovering at least one reality that is never represented in its wording and, as a result, never obtains its proper lot of attention inside a classroom, neither time- nor content-wise. I am referring to the mode of production, the name given to society by Karl Marx, when he analyzed it in terms of how its individual members maintained different positions, and fulfilled diverse roles, in relation to the means of social wealth. This variable accordingly divided them into the groups we call social classes. Of course, one should not hasten to interpret the absence of this reality from the content-goals of education as if it were truthfully external to, or insignificant for, the field of education, let alone for the vast province of the social and the human sciences; for it is not. Quite to the contrary, sociology discovered long ago that clear-cut sociological variables not only end up affecting in numerous and intense ways the lives children lead as grown up workers, but, most importantly, that they already play a major role during the earlier steps of their instruction. Social division has educational consequences which no reasonable pedagogue will fail to observe (McKeon, 1994; Wrigley, 2000).

As evidence of this, suffice it to say that Marx’s original research laid down the suitable conditions for future discoveries (for instance Pierre Bourdieu’s) on how social division of labour and the ownership of the means of production shaped an ample scope of facts well-known today by
educators. The sheer idea that “in calculating the cost of production of simple labour power there must be included the cost of reproduction, whereby the race of workers is enabled to multiply and to replace worn-out workers by new ones” is tightly interwoven to an immense network of implications, the consideration of which no social scientist can simply decide to ignore when approaching social phenomena, including the facts of education (Marx, 1847, p. 206). At a strictly pedagogical level, for example, Jim Cummins (1986, 1988, 1994) has insistently claimed that, as a result of the larger social inertias, teacher-student interactions tend to reproduce spontaneously the general power dynamics between races and social classes that determine a given social context—unless educators become aware of this dialectic, and counteract it with alternative pedagogies. Likewise, regarding the sociological level, we are nowadays flooded with evidence of upward mobility no longer being an effective tendency, since the unjust way value is distributed among the workers through the salary system compels sons and daughters either to replace their parents at their exact workplace, or to plunge directly into unemployment. As a matter of fact, the impossibility of labour ever being paid at its proper rate under capitalist relations of production entirely subtends the present international economic crisis. In view of this, I believe that our problems as professional academics and scholars are no longer confined today to the theoretical misconceptions or mistakes that may derive from the overwhelming presence of ideology and the hopelessness of our capitalist society ever correcting itself by looking into the mirror ideology offers. What is at stake right now is the very viability and functionality of some of our most basic institutions, especially health and educational. As regards the latter, the situation in Greece, Portugal and Spain may serve as good examples.

A similar argument, by the way, could also be held regarding another prominent theory that, just like Marx’s, has long been kept out of most educational and scientific curricula and barred from the standard forms of institutional sanctioning. I am referring to psycho-analysis, which describes the mental life of an individual from the vantage point afforded by the discovery that the psychic apparatus is divided into conscious and unconscious regions, among which determining mental representations (such as fantasies or memories) are distributed. Its exclusion from the human sciences has taken place despite the fact that, in his life-long quest for the traces of the sexual drive, Sigmund Freud soon came to realize that “the psycho-analysis of an adult neurotic is equivalent to an after-education”, and also that the complex mechanisms of primary and secondary forms of repression, of sublimation, and of the other destinies
the libido underwent in its urge for satisfaction, necessarily conditioned intelligence, concentration, effort and working-aptitude indicators, in children and adults the same (Freud, 1925, p. 4168; Cho, 2009). Many are the suggestions dealing with this idea that Freud left scattered along his works (1916-1917, p. 2405; 1925, pp. 2834-5), but it is not the aim of this paper to comment on them. Leaving more field-specific theses aside, Freud’s (1925; 1937) general thoughts on education crystallized around the idea that teaching was one of three impossible professions, together with governing and healing, due to the paradoxical and contradictory nature of all three. At the core of this assertion lies the fact that, while the bright and clear intelligence children show during the first five years of their lifetime is soon thwarted by instinctual repression (Freud, 1927; Freud, A., 1931), teachers cannot, all the same, spare them this repressive mechanism, at least if education and cultural heredity are to pass on from generation to generation (Freud, 1916-17). Hence the impossible and contradictory nature of an educators’ profession, for neurotic symptoms and a lessened cunning and creativity—Freud (1927) says, “think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intellectual powers of the average adult” (p. 4455)—are the collateral and negative consequences of an educational process which, however, on the face of the alternative, cannot but be considered a lesser evil. Furthermore, it was to ameliorate this evil that psycho-analytic therapy offered itself as a proper compensation. This line of research was taken up and applied to school children by his daughter Anna Freud, by Nelly Wolffheim, Wilhelm Reich, Vera Schmidt, Hans Zulliger, and D. W. Winnicott, among others. But Freud (1933) himself ascertained that the only “appropriate preparation for the profession of an educator is a thorough psycho-analytic training” (p. 4749).

An education to reality

In view of the situation that affects theoretical and scientific instruction in our society, the first aim of this chapter is no other than to denounce the incongruence inherent in the fact that young learners are institutionally barred, curricula-wise, from learning about subject matters which deeply determine their present and their future lives, such as is the case of the dynamics of a mode of production. I believe that this concealment should be interpreted in the light of the almost unanimous endeavour, undertaken by governments and publishing houses alike, to sanitize educational syllabi and classroom resources. This strategy manifests itself regardless of the field of studies involved (Cummins, 1996; Bigelow, 2008). For
instance, it has been argued that this sanitation plan has affected nearly every EFL textbook that is sold internationally. It is difficult to ascertain the damage thereby provoked to English learners, who have missed the opportunity to build and improve their language and critical skills through engaging topics. “For reasons generally attributed to the production of mainstream coursebooks produced for the general EFL class regardless of where they are used,” Dario Banegas (2010) claims,

publishers avoid the inclusion of provocative topics in developing the units of work coursebooks may be divided into. This has produced a set of guidelines summarized as PARSNIP (Gray, 2000; Akbari, 2008). This acronym stands for the avoidance of topics related to politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, such as communism, capitalism, feminism among others, and pornography. (p. 1)

Without a doubt, all these subjects could be suitably confronted either through Marx’s or Freud’s theoretical paradigms. More important than this, however, is to underline the decisive course of action taken by Banegas (2011, 2011a, 2012) as a reaction to this generalized expurgation. Through a collaborative action research project, he developed a set of controversial topics to enrich the EFL syllabus and connect it to the students’ Argentinean reality.

In line with this initiative, I defend the need for reality to return to the curricula; that is, for a re-enactment of an ‘education to reality’ (Freud, 1927, p. 4456), the main characteristic of which is that attention, time and effort are distributed among school topics in direct proportion to the way their corresponding subject matters impinge on the students’ realities. Freud (1930) grieved deeply in his own day that education concealed from children “the part which sexuality will play in their lives” (p. 4523). Something similar can still be maintained today, not so much with regard to sexuality (for, luckily, many changes have occurred in this case), but rather about the knowledge obtained of the social structure in which pupils necessarily participate, and the division of which conditions their lives. As it is well known, this is one of the main objectives pursued by any critical pedagogy that, like Paulo Freire’s, focuses on the need to understand the word at the same time as the world in which the former occurs (Freire & Macedo, 1987/2006). Undoubtedly, the first cannot occur without being affected by the second. The following quote by Marxist pedagogue Peter McLaren may shed more light onto this argument. “Every student is endowed,” McLaren (2011) defends,
with the capacity for reasoning critically about his or her life and should be apprised of the opportunity for understanding the complex and multilayered context in which his life is lived [...]. Every student has a right to ask: what has my history, my experiences as an individual living in a capitalist society made of me that I no longer want to be? (p. 231)

If this is the case, then educators have the absolute duty to help students formulate these types of questions inside the classroom—for instance, by preparing an interactional context that enables such interrogations to arise—; but also, to provide the basic conceptual tools for them to lead their own self-reflective reasoning towards a rational answer and a consistent and constructive end. Students shall not be left to wander aimlessly and desperately inside a blind alley, in an intellectual cul-de-sac. Following along this track, the Editors of *Rethinking Schools* (2012) proposed recently that teachers “need to turn [their] attention to investigating the origins of the economic crisis that has laid a blanket of hardship and insecurity over so much of the world [... and equip] students with the critical skills to interrogate the economic inequality that from year to year yawns even wider” (p. 6). Of course, only some pedagogical approaches will be suitable to this aim, since many are the affective, ideological, and conceptual stumbling blocks one can expect a student to find in the process of building his/her own identity around these critical topics. As a matter of fact, only dialogic orientations to pedagogy—ones that place *discussion, not transmission*, at the center of their practice (Elliott, 1992; Gibbons, 2009)—, which prompt pupils to question their deep-rooted beliefs and perceptions at the same time as they reinforce trust and confidence in education and in their own abilities, will prove capable of sustaining them throughout this critical development through which identities are rebuilt and *expanded* (Cummins, 1994; Roz Camangian, 2013).

Difficult as this challenge may seem, it is worth a try. Many positive consequences derive from considering the individual as part of a bigger and more complex reality and from judging education as the process whereby students should gain awareness of this fact. Among these consequences, I do not want to miss the opportunity to suggest the way this perspective criticizes and impinges on *humanism*, on what Charles Sarland (2009) has recently defined as the *liberal humanist consensus* (p. 36). As far as literary studies are concerned, this ideology is still the dominant one. Nor are the ideas defended in this chapter compatible with the relativistic and subjectivist illusions cherished by post-modernism and the so-called cultural studies, which focus all their enmity against concepts like *objectivity* and *scientific knowledge* (Watkins, 2009). These doctrines
are to be held responsible for the fact that, whilst students are introduced in school into the knowledge (however basic) of the specific subject matters of biology and physics (of the internal laws of species and of the universe), they are on the other hand completely barred from developing any acquaintance whatsoever with the other strata of which their lives also consist; for instance, the subject matter of sociology, or psychology. Should ignorance prove to be a good safeguard against the impingement of reality, this curricular void would not bring about effects as grave as it actually leads to. But I am afraid that objectivity always ends up overcoming, one way or another, whatever barriers falsehood and ignorance build against it.

**The role of literature in an education to reality**

Luckily, among other resources and strategies, teachers can rely on literature to compensate for this institutional oversight, for this educational void. Needless to say that before literature can fulfil this function, the way it is taught and included in school curricula must greatly evolve. As an example of this required shift, let me start by providing a general definition of literature, one that stems from much of what has been said up to now, especially concerning the methodology adopted by Marxian sociology. From this standpoint, literature could be conceptualized as those linguistic metaphors a human being produces about realities that affect him/her in ways of which s/he is generally ignorant, even while s/he is rendering them in a particular linguistic form. According to this definition, human ignorance would inevitably account for literary representations being, as a norm, *incomplete* as well as *distorted* by the very determinations the author ignores—hence the appropriateness of calling them *metaphoric*. Literary artefacts should be regarded as symbolic distortions of a multi-layered reality, the effect of which on the human individual (the author) is not spontaneously accompanied by the latter’s accurate knowledge of it, except after laborious scientific work.

Considering literary artefacts, it is plain that social and psychic variables exert the dominant influence. Nonetheless, they continue to be absent from school curricula. In this chapter, I find it pressing to concentrate on the literary effects that derive from the ignorance of Marx’s work. It was through concepts such as *ideology*, the *camera obscura* (Marx & Engels, 1845, p. 154) or the *phenomenal forms* (Marx, 1894, pp. 265-85), that Marxian sociology was able to explain not only the individual and social unawareness that institutionally silenced this theory down and prevented it from enjoying an official scientific status; for it was
also able to shed light onto the metaphorical representations that individuals and institutions created in its stead. In view of this, it is no coincidence that this theory ended up becoming a powerful critical methodology, first in the very hands of Marx, later on in those of Lenin, Lukács, Brecht, Adorno, Althusser, Macherey, Williams, Jameson, Zipes (the latter in the realm of children’s literature), and so many others. In a similar fashion, it is well known how the influence of psycho-analysis (especially through Bettelheim’s seminal but problematic work) became fruitful in the field of literary studies and children’s literature (Bosmajian, 2009). In both cases, it was through the exercise of what may be considered their most distinctive methodological concept, the \textit{symptomatic reading}, that these approaches supplied scientific explanations for the genesis of unscientific cultural artefacts (Althusser, 1965, p. 22). They probed into the objective reasons which account for content deformations (Macherey, 1966/2006; Jameson, 1982, cited in Zipes, 2009, pp. 2-3).

At the end of the day, this is precisely the reason why I believe Marxian sociology could also afford an interesting didactic method whereby reading literature was used as a facilitating tool for students to understand some basic scientific concepts. This is the chief interdisciplinary object that my paper pursues: namely, to maximize the pedagogic potential which, according to this theory, remains concealed in every literary work. In posing this challenge—for a challenge it is—I am also following suit from Ballester’s (1998) attempt to derive a set of didactical premises from different schools of literary criticism. What undoubtedly makes the Marxist school of criticism so special, however, is that it belongs to a wider theory, one which attempts to trace the literary phenomena back to objective determinations and causes, amiable to scientific rationality.

\textbf{Methodology}

Since this didactic hypothesis may be difficult to follow, I will try to present it in the most clear and organized manner. In my opinion, Marxian sociology bears the seeds of an interdisciplinary didactics which would no longer confine literature to teaching and learning a first, second, or foreign language, nor to producing aesthetic enjoyment only (Duff & Maley, 1996; Lazar, 1993). These two dimensions are perfectly sound and should be respected and attained; but, in addition to them, a critical and interdisciplinary didactics of literature would contribute to building up students’ scientific knowledge by facilitating their acquaintance with the
objective processes that so intensely affect their reality as much as any literary work.

How should this proposal be carried out? Let me draw on some examples so I can explain. The tale “Why?” by Herminia Zur Mühlén, published in a 1925 collection called *Fairy Tales for Workers’ Children*, and included in Mickenberg & Nel (2008), provides a metaphorical model of the pedagogical movement to be followed. The main character of this story is Paul, an orphan boy who, were it chronologically feasible, could have been fashioned after the subjective paradigm that psycho-analyst Jacques-Alain Miller described as an *asker*, as one who “ask[s] insistently, and the very fact meant by [this] questioning installs in the analytic experience the dimension of knowledge” (1984, pp. 63-4). Let us see why.

A sad life it was for little Paul. He never heard a kind word, no one loved him, and no one petted or comforted him whenever he was unhappy. Instead of that he was scolded every day and often he was even spanked. One peculiarity of his particularly irritated the supervisors of the poorhouse: at every occasion he used to ask, ‘Why?’ always wanting to know the cause of everything.

‘You mustn’t always ask why,’ angrily declared the stout Matron who was in charge of the poorhouse. ‘Everything is as it is, and therefore it is right.’

‘But why have I no parents like the other children of the village have?’ insisted little Paul.

‘Because they are dead.’

‘Why did they die?’

‘Because the good Lord willed it so.’

‘Why did the Lord will it so?’

‘Keep quiet, you good-for-nothing! Leave me alone with your eternal questions’. (Zur Mühlén, 1925, p. 141)

According to psycho-analysis, all curiosity is sexual in origin. This means children’s early queries, of the sort described in this story (as repetitive and obsessive as Paul’s), should be interpreted as displacements, substitutions or metaphors of a central, sexual doubt which a child represses and holds back from his consciousness. Zu Mühlén’s tale remains faithful to this dynamic, even though she changes the nature of the doubt concerned. In this case, Paul does not long for a sexual enlightenment (still, Freud would argue that the latter remained the final cause), but he is rather obsessed and preoccupied with Marx’s subject matter, i.e., with the reasons accounting for *social inequality*. This is the one phenomenon of which he actually knows he is ignorant. At the end of the tale, Paul bumps into an ill-tempered, demanding Dryad, and it is then
when the reader finally understands that the kid’s previous, irritable questions were but substitutions for, and distortions of, the one important issue he never allowed himself to ask for fear of being beaten, insulted or lied to: “Why am I poor?”, “Why are there rich people in the world?” “Why have the idlers everything and the workers nothing?” These are the mysteries that functioned as the real but secret engine that pushed Paul’s curiosity forward, and also the tale’s entire plot, which clearly symbolizes a learning process. In his quest for reaching the knowledge of the mode of production in which he lives and suffers, Paul encounters all the series of epistemological obstacles that inhere in social reality. In the end, however, he overcomes them with the help of the Dryad (the mentor, the ideal teacher) who directs him towards knowledge and social transformation.

‘Then I must continue asking questions?’
‘Yes, little Paul, but do not ask the rich, they will not answer you because if they did they would have to say, “The world is such a bad place for poor people because we, the rich, are greedy, selfish, vile,” and no person likes to say that about himself. But go to the poor and ask them, “Why do you eat dry bread though you work hard, while the idle rich eat cake? Why are your children pale, thin and ill while the rich children are rosy, fat and healthy? […] Ask the poor people these questions so long and so often that they will fall on the structure of injustice like a hammer and smash it. Will you do that, little Paul?’
‘Yes,’ replied the boy with the eyes alight. (p. 145)

The reason why I defend that this tale holds a metaphorical mirror to an education to reality is that, methodologically speaking, a teacher should operate just like the dryad in this story does. Teachers should identify the metaphors, displacements and ideological substitutions that play havoc in the students’ knowledge; next, help the latter scrutinize these displacements against the background of the original and determining factors that caused them; and, finally, encourage pupils to act in common to transform the world and change the deforming inertias in reality. In doing so, teachers would reproduce the different phases identified by any critical pedagogy (Ada, 1988, as cited in Cummins, 1994, pp. 49-52; Peterson, 2007; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007, pp. 44-6). In fact, they would act in the same manner as Marx first departed from Hegel’s philosophy and then from capitalist ideology, for example; or Freud from the symptomatic formations his patients brought to him—that is, by starting off from the (symptomatic, ideological) literary text and reconstructing backwards the process whereby objective causes assaulted the author unbeknownst to him/her, and deformed the resulting literary work by turning it into a metaphor of those objective processes and of
their corresponding scientific representations. Obviously, a writer may make a conscious decision to oppose his or her text to science, but this intentional aspect changes nothing in relation to the didactic strategy the teacher should employ to approach a literary work. The teacher should, first, make clear to students the distinction between literature and science, as well as the fact that aesthetic quality has nothing to do, in principle, with scientific knowledge. Next, s/he should deal with children’s literature as consisting of metaphors of objective processes, and thus as a potential point of departure for introducing scientific theories in the classroom, which present an accurate explanation of such developments. Finally, a dialogic teacher-student interaction framed by the principles of critical pedagogy should lead to changes (however slight) arising in relation to this specific issue.

Let me express this pedagogic process in a different way. The didactic potential inherent in metaphors should be taken advantage of inasmuch as metaphoric distortions can provide an adequate, albeit indirect, access to knowledge. This idea has never been foreign to Marxist pedagogy (Lewis, 2009). According to Terry Wrigley (2009), for example, the possibility of bridging the gap between metaphor and science was at the core of Raymond Williams’ cultural endeavour, of his ideal of an education that would both respect the ‘ordinary’ culture—in the sense of both creative activity and its products and of a culture as a ‘whole way of life’—and provide access to (a critical reading of) the selective tradition”. This sort of reading would already provide “a clear understanding of scientific theory. The one pole without the other,” he concludes, “provides a limited education”. (pp. 26-7)

In an attempt to theorize this complex dialectic, many pedagogues have resorted to the concept of mediation, precisely to refer to the teacher’s ability to take his/her students beyond their spontaneous ideas or beliefs and escort them to a rigorous scientific outlook. According to Pauline Gibbons (2006), concrete didactic strategies such as recasting, contingent response, and message redundancy in dialogic teacher-student interaction may afford opportunities for learning that also involve successful knowledge developments, even identity expansions (pp. 236-57).

In our approach, this role could be fulfilled by insisting and taking advantage of the metaphoric quality of literature. If every metaphor participates in objectivity to the extent that real causes determined the distortion it displays, then a teacher may first want to analyse the imaginative way a tale describes certain phenomena, but later make sure that students also receive the correct and complete scientific account,
accompanied by suggestions on the possible causes that acted behind that deformation. Though in a simplified fashion, I designed a didactic intervention of this type in relation to “The Corner,” a short fable about one of Frog and Toad’s many adventures, as originally conceived by Arnold Lobel. Let me describe the basic plotline and then unfold my commentary. In this short masterpiece from the book *Frog and Toad All Year*, Frog recalls a childhood memory of him misunderstanding his father’s words: “Son, this is a cold, gray day but spring is just around the corner” (Lobel, 1976, p. 20). Eager as he was to feel the first sunrays of the year on his greenish skin, Frog set off on a journey through an idyllic territory, searching for the spring. Through woods, meadows, rivers, and valleys, he looked for a season which he believed would be waiting for him at a real corner of the landscape. Clearly, the story celebrates Frog’s formative and pedagogic wanderings through the pastoral universe in which it is set, so redolent of *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame. The reader gladly follows Frog from one corner to another, and then, after his long walk, back to the roundabouts of his own house where his parents welcome him, already with the first rays of the spring sun shining on their backs.

‘I found another corner. It was the corner of my house.’
‘Did you go around it?’ asked Toad.
‘I went around that corner, too,’ said Frog.
‘What did you see?’ asked Toad.
‘I saw the sun coming out,’ said Frog. ‘I saw birds sitting and singing in a tree. I saw my mother and father working in the garden. I saw flowers in the garden.’
‘You found it!’ cried Toad.
‘Yes,’ said Frog. ‘I was very happy. I had found the corner that spring was just around’. (p. 28)

The fable takes advantage of young Frog’s innocent ignorance (which may be shared by the children who read it) in order to actualize the full aesthetic potential of an everyday metaphoric expression. In doing so, it also explores the intricacies of literal and figurative meanings, as well as the inevitability of confusing them at a young age, as Frog does. Hence my advice that, in order to complement this tale, any education to reality should present the real causes of the seasonal cycle, an explanation that the text does not provide. Recalling the guiding principle of Raymond William’s cultural pedagogy, I suggest that pupils should read and enjoy first the poetic and humorous quality of the story, but that once this first phase is over, the teacher should start to familiarize them with the