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THEMENSCHWERPUNKT:

Erzählen in multilingualen und interkulturellen Kontexten

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Storytelling in Multilingual and Intercultural Contexts – An Introduction

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Abstract:

Introduction to the main topic “Storytelling in multilingual and intercultural contexts”.

This introduction is also available in German. Die deutsche Version der Einführung finden Sie ab Seite 1 und hier <https://doi.org/10.48694/zif.3614>.

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There's no point in making up a world, Elisabeth said, when there's a real world. There's just the world, and there's the truth about the world.

You mean, there's the truth, and there's the made-up version of it that we get told about the world, Daniel said.

No. The world exists. Stories are made up, Elisabeth said.

But no less true for that, Daniel said.

That's ultra crazy talk, Elisabeth said.

And whoever makes up the story makes up the world, Daniel said. So always try to welcome people into the home of your story. That's my suggestion.

Ali Smith, *Autumn* (2016: 119)

1 Storytelling as a cultural practice

Storytelling as a cultural practice is an essential part of being human (cf. Wulf 2019). Before there was writing, there was oral storytelling through myths, legends, fables, epic poems, chants, rhymes, songs, prayers, proverbs, and more. Across genres, time periods, and cultures, stories have always circulated as a way to entertain, to inform, to disseminate and communicate about cultural practices, traditions and shared values. Storytelling is so central to human nature that *homo sapiens*, the thinking person, could more aptly be called *homo narrans*, the storytelling person, given our propensity to organise and interpret the world in terms of narrative patterns that shape our lives (c.f. Barthes 1975; Fisher 1987; MacIntyre 1981). From an early age, children grow into narrative contexts and acquire language and literature, self, and world through narrative, imagining *possible worlds* (Bruner 1986).

Bruner posits that there are two modes of thought, two different but complementary human cognitive activities involved in constructing reality and ordering experiences: the first is the *paradigmatic* mode which is based on understanding the world through empirical discovery, analysis, and explanation; the second is the *narrative* mode which seeks to make sense of human experience through a recognition of patterns and connections that underpin human choices and actions, a way of gaining knowledge about oneself and the world beyond formal processes of scientific investigation (Bruner 1986: 11–12).

In particular, the second perspective or the narrative mode of thinking, often neglected in pedagogical and disciplinary teaching contexts, is foregrounded in this special issue whose overarching theme highlights the privileged status that stories and storytelling occupy in human cognition and cultural expression. Drawing on different conceptual and empirical frameworks, the nine contributions to the volume seek to examine how narrative storytelling functions both to reveal human experience and to help shape it through contextualised

experiences. Focusing specifically on the multilingual and intercultural dimensions of human interaction as constructed in narrative, the articles bring to light the particular significance of narratives in negotiating linguistic and cultural diversity.

We accept a certain essential contestability of stories; this is what makes narrative so viable in cultural negotiation. You tell your version, I tell mine, and only rarely do we need litigation to settle the difference. We easily take competing story versions with a perspectival grain of salt, much more so than arguments or proofs. (Bruner 2005: 36)

Some articles reveal the importance of storytelling in multilingual and multimodal situations of language acquisition in multilingual families. Others demonstrate the linguistic-literary learning potential of storytelling with multilingual groups in second and foreign language educational contexts. Still other articles draw on multilingual and multimodal stories in children's literature or in narrative play to propose ideas for linguistic-literary teaching and learning in school contexts.

2 Storytelling in multilingual settings

Storytelling takes place in all cultural-linguistic contexts and narrating is also linguistically diverse. As children grow into our society, they are always surrounded by multilingualism (cf. Franceschini 2011; Gogolin 2018), whether in terms of the internal multilingualism of dialects, sociolects or other varieties (cf. Wandruszka 1979), or in terms of the external multilingualism of different languages, such as those spoken in the family, the neighbourhood or educational institutions as a result of migration patterns (cf. Fürstenau/Gomolla 2011; Oomen-Welke 2020). Narrative plays a significant role in all these languages, varieties, and in their different registers. It serves individual expression, the structuring of experience, intersubjective understanding, and community building.

In addition to its identity-related and communication-oriented functions, narrative is also relevant in learning situations in connection with language(s), writing(s) and image(s). Here, narratives – whether oral, written, or visual – play a crucial role in the acquisition of language, literacy, and visual literacy, also in the context of multilingualism. In *oral narrative situations*, such as everyday conversations, role-playing or scenic storytelling, children learn about and try out concepts, character constellations and narrative structures by imagining possible worlds (cf. Bruner 1986), as empirical studies emphatically show (cf. Naujok 2018). Consequently, narrative is of crucial importance in first, second and foreign language acquisition, also in multilingual settings. It can be made fruitful for educational contexts, whether through the integration of storytelling rituals in everyday teaching or kindergarten life; for example, in the form of storytelling circles (with stories experienced by oneself or shared together) or also in the form of projects within educational institutions,

such as regular visits by professional storytellers who use facial expressions, gestures and voice modulation to bring particular traditional, cross-cultural narratives to life and, thereby, widen the scope of participation for children (cf. Ulich 2014; Wardetzky 2019; Wardetzky/Weigel 2010).

Beyond oral narrative situations, *written narratives*, especially from children's literature, represent a significant resource for children's language and literacy acquisition in multilingual contexts. Empirical studies on media socialisation in the family context demonstrate that children's literature is an occasion for conversation and storytelling between parents and children and its reception can become a shared experience among siblings (cf. Hoffmann 2008; Vishek 2021; Wieler et al. 2008). In the school context, too, both empirical and theoretical studies point to the central importance of children's literature for linguistic-literary learning in first, second, and foreign language teaching as it ties in with the children's lifeworld and experiences, is rich in linguistic and literary patterns, and enables a different, aesthetic approach to the world (cf. Bland 2018; Dehn/Merklinger/Schüler 2011; Ellis 2016; Ommundsen et al. 2022; Wieler 2018). Of particular salience in multilingual learning contexts is multilingual children's literature, especially multilingual picture books that tell stories in two or more languages simultaneously. They make different languages and scripts visible and can therefore encourage discussion of language and support language awareness. However, therefore, highlighting their potential for multilingual reception situations, children's literature research has also generated critical debate about these multilingual books since parallel narration and arrangement of writing can establish dominances or create redundancies (cf. Eder/Dirim 2017; Gawlitzek/Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013; Vach 2015; Vishek 2019). Notwithstanding, research on children's literature teaching assigns multilingual children's literature diverse learning potentials overall (cf. Ballis/Pecher/Schuler 2018; Eder 2009).

In addition to the power of oral narrative situations and written narratives in early learning, the potential of *visual narratives* for children's acquisition of visual literacy, multiliteracies and multimodal understanding is central to language education (cf. Dehn 2019; Hélot/Sneddon/Daly 2014). Recently, an increasing number of empirical studies point to the possibilities and challenges of wordless picture books for language and literacy learning in multilingual settings (cf. Arizpe/Colomer/Martínez-Roldán 2014; Conrad/Michalak/Winter 2021; Hoffmann 2019; Wieler 2013). The visual narratives call for transformation processes (cf. Dehn 2019) from the reception of images into the production of language, writing, design, dance, or other physical forms of expression in a special way. They are open to diverse linguistic approaches and are, therefore, particularly suitable for multilingual learning groups with recent immigrant children, as they create space for participation during the reception process and open up language learning opportunities in follow-up communication.

Overall, narrated stories for children, whether in roleplays and enactments, in oral storytelling, through written or visual narratives in the form of children's literature or children's media, and especially through multimodal picture books, provide rich opportunities for young learners to encounter different languages, to approach them from their own language repertoires, and to perceive linguistic and multilingual learning opportunities in initial reception settings and in classroom conversations.

3 Intercultural learning with stories

Not all stories are historically accurate or 'true' in a reliable way; in fact, the potential of stories does not reside in their 'objective truth' value but rather in the way they order experiences, shape identities, and create cultural cohesion (cf. Koschorke 2018). Good stories present vivid *paracosms*, that is, local and distinctive story landscapes filled with highly particularised details, yet accessible to audiences from different standpoints (cf. Mastellotto 2018). Stories nurture connections among people through the narration of shared human experiences or universal insights which transcend differences related to situated realities and identities.

The human propensity for noticing and grasping the broad cultural scripts, even without any explicit instruction, suggests that we acquire the shared background knowledge, conceptual frameworks, and negotiated values in different cultural contexts at a young age through implicit exposure and intuitive learning (cf. Ramstead/Veissière/Kirmayer 2016). Widely shared beliefs and attitudes circulate in society through cultural forms of expression whose semantic patterns remain stable despite variations in form. The variety and polyphony of stories and the different languages of storytelling open diverse perspectives on the world and can contribute to mutual understanding in intercultural contexts (cf. Hoffmann 2011; 2018; Scherer/Vach 2019).

Stories can be a powerful pedagogical medium for navigating issues of identity construction and inclusion in early learning, especially in foreign-language education where attention is directed to linguistic and cultural diversity and the world beyond the classroom through a focus on the acquisition of foreign-language competences for intercultural communication (cf. Cates 2002; Lütge 2015; Lütge/Merse/Rauschert 2022). In addition to providing affordances for language learning, story-based instruction in schooling also provides affordances for the development of the interrelated attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed for intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which enables learners to interact with others in a socially and culturally appropriate manner (cf. Byram 2021; Byram/Doyé 1999) and to contribute to society as democratic citizens (cf. Byram/Golubeva/Hui 2017).

Affordances are linguistic opportunities for action or interaction that can be taken up when a learner perceives them and makes use of them. Affordances arise through conversation with interlocutors and through a learner's interaction with the environment – books, media, realia, objects, displays, etc. – which helps to develop his or her communicative competences (cf. Aronin 2017, 2014; Aronin/Singleton 2012; van Lier 2002). In foreign-language learning, the intercultural dimension of communicative competence is highlighted; not only do students develop knowledge and skills in the foreign language, but they also develop intercultural understanding and social engagement through immersion in a language-rich and culture-rich environment, making use of various properties within the environment as opportunities for learning. Intercultural learning in the foreign-language classroom can be supported through teachers' careful selection of books which are authentic and highly engaging, present diversity in affirming contexts, and stimulate intercultural reflection and discussion among students.

Literary texts, including picture books, a form of multimodal children's literature, are rich intercultural resources since they present story worlds populated by characters and situations that may be socially and culturally different from learners' own realities, enabling processes of identification, differentiation and empathy as children are immersed in narrative landscapes and encounter social and cultural-diversity. Through these imaginary encounters, learners can engage with other perspectives from their own horizon of experience, cultivating a "narrative imagination" (Nussbaum 2010) which supports the development of values and behaviours that are important in social coexistence.

Engaging with narratives that authentically reflect diversity can encourage young readers to be flexible in their perspectives (cf. Bland 2016) and help them to develop empathy (cf. Ghosn 2001). Perspective-taking tasks related to reading stories and participating in storytelling practices can help stimulate an open mindset, as well as intercultural awareness and dialogue, which can contribute to more positive interpersonal and intergroup attitudes (cf. Vezzali/Stathi/Giovannini 2012). The ability for perspective-taking and empathy are especially important in the face of rapid and unprecedented global sociocultural changes contributing to ever-growing "superdiversity" in schools and society (Vertovec 2007). Stories, therefore, offer promising pedagogical opportunities for learners to develop functional and narrative literacies (cf. Dehn et al. 2011), social, emotional, and cognitive competences (cf. Ghosn 2013), and intercultural understanding and inclusive practices (cf. Mastellotto 2020).

4 About the contributions in the special issue

The contributions in this special issue address a range of research strands in the field of multilingual and intercultural learning in relation to storytelling. What are suitable peda-

gological and didactic approaches to unlock the fundamental potential of storytelling in multilingual and intercultural learning contexts from kindergarten and primary school up to university level? Which multilingual narrative practices can be observed in home environments and which in teaching or other educational contexts? Which processes of multilingual, and intercultural learning can be reconstructed from narrative situations? How do multimodal media create opportunities for story-based conversations, dialogic readings, scenic storytelling, and creative writing with children? How do narrative practices and storytelling contribute to the development of multiliteracies for young learners and contribute to their acquisition of self and world? This special issue explores these questions from the perspectives of childhood and primary education, (second) language acquisition and foreign language teaching, children's literature studies and literature teaching, as well as higher education teaching practices. Picture books play a significant role across the volume, as well as other forms of narratives such as told fairy tales and games.

The volume is organised in two parts: the first part brings together five qualitative-empirical studies on storytelling in multilingual settings in home, school, and university environments, addressing how multilingual, rhymed, wordless, scenic, or otherwise told stories contribute to language and literature learning in first and second-language acquisition. The second part comprises four contributions on intercultural learning through story-based instruction, presenting various conceptual frameworks for the use of narratives to enhance young learners' intercultural awareness in contexts ranging from linguistic and literary education to game-based education to citizenship education.

4.1 Multilingual Storytelling

In her contribution, “Participation in Storytelling Settings. Multimodality in Multilingual Contexts”, **Natascha Naujok** explores the question of what scope for participation is opened up through regular, multimodally designed storytelling situations by professional storytellers in learning groups of recent immigrant students in primary school. To this end, she presents the ethnographic research project *Erzählbrücken (Narrative Bridges)*, based in Berlin (Germany), with its theoretical and methodological foundation. In empirical interaction analyses conducted at a primary school in Berlin and based on selected narrative sequences of the English fairy tale *Der faule Jakob (Lazy Jack)* and the Portuguese fairy tale *Die Steinsuppe (Sopa da pedra)*, Naujok shows a variety of possibilities for children's participation in narrative situations in a new language from the very beginning. These lie in various forms of physical co-telling during the narrative situation itself, as well as in other forms of expression such as writing, drawing, and presenting within the framework of follow-up-interactions.

The contribution “*Io sono foglia – Erzählen mit Bilderbüchern in mehrsprachigen Kontexten. Das Südtiroler Projekt IMAGO*” (“*Io sono foglia – Storytelling with picture books in multilingual contexts. The South Tyrolean project IMAGO*”) by **Jeanette Hoffmann** is

dedicated to the question of how picturebooks in different narrative forms are received in multilingual educational contexts. For this purpose, the ongoing qualitative-empirical study *IMAGO. Picturebooks – multilingual, rhymed, and wordless – in kindergartens and primary schools in South Tyrol* is presented by outlining the theoretical and empirical starting points as well as the research design. Key incident analyses from the first survey phase at a German-language primary school (in Italy) on language and literature learning processes with the rhymed picturebook *Io sono foglia* (Mozzillo/Balducci 2020) in Italian-as-a-second-language lessons provide insight into everyday teaching practice. The findings highlight the diverse linguistic-literary learning potentials and, at the same time, the challenges of an aesthetic approach to a second language (the first or foreign language for some pupils) which is characterised by ambiguity and metaphor.

In their contribution, “Scaffolding-Verfahren in L2-Erzählsituationen. Eine Analyse am Beispiel mehrsprachiger Kinder aus den ladinischen Tälern Südtirols” (“Scaffolding in L2 narrative sequences. An analysis based on the example of plurilingual children from the Ladin valleys in South Tyrol”), **Katharina Salzmänn** and **Ruth Videsott** address the question of which scaffolding measures adult interlocutors use in narrative adult-child interactions and how multilingual children react to these in their second languages, German or Italian. To this end, they provide a theoretical overview of children's narrative acquisition, adult scaffolding techniques, and the sociolinguistic context in the trilingual Ladin valleys of South Tyrol (Italy). The linguistic analyses are based on interview data from the empirical-qualitative project *AcuiLad* on interactive narrative sequences in dyadic picturebook reception situations ranging from German-language concept books to Italian-language board books from the *Pimpa* series to the wordless picture book *Die Torte ist weg!* (Tjong-King 2017). It becomes clear that the interlocutors use different scaffolding procedures depending on the age and language acquisition stage of the children – but independent of the language practised.

In her contribution “Mehrsprachiges Erzählen im deutsch-russischen Bilderbuch *Lindbergh* von Torben Kuhlmann und dessen Rezeption im Rahmen einer mehrsprachigen Vorlesesituation” (“Multilingual Storytelling in the German-Russian Picture Book *Lindbergh* by Torben Kuhlmann and its Reception in the Context of a Multilingual Read-Aloud Situation”), **Svetlana Vishek** pursues the question of what specific potential multilingual picturebooks have from the perspective of multilingual recipients in family reading aloud situations in the German-Russian context (in Germany). Against the theoretical background of an imaginative, experiential, and co-constructive understanding of reception, as well as an intermodal picturebook analysis, she draws on an ethnographic conversation analysis of a reading-aloud situation between father and son with the German-Russian edition of the picturebook *Lindbergh/Линдберг* (Kuhlmann 2018) to show how the theme, place, language, and images of the story form a complex frame of reference for the multilingual reception situation.

In her article “Von kollaborativer Imagination zu translingualer Narration. Erforschung multilingualer und multimodaler Erzählstrategien durch bilinguale Lehramtsstudierende” (“From collaborative imagination to translingual narration: Investigating multilingual and multimodal storytelling with bilingual student teachers”), **Esa Christine Hartmann** explores the question of what potential students attribute to didactic approaches to multimodal and translingual storytelling in relation to children's learning processes in a multilingual context (in France). The research project *Multilingual and multimodal storytelling strategies in bilingual teaching* is part of the bilingual teacher training programme (primary level, German-French) at the University of Strasbourg, in which bilingual student teachers design multimodal and translingual instructional activities with analogue and digital picturebook stories, such as the multilingual picturebook app *Die große Wörterfabrik/The big word Factory/La grande fabrique des mots* (Lestrade/Docampo 2012), and explore them with preschool and primary school children. Based on written surveys of the student teachers, content analysis is used to determine the extent to which they consider the literary and aesthetic-performative approaches to be suitable support for children's multimodal and multilingual narrative acquisition.

4.2 Intercultural Storytelling

In her contribution, “Picturebooks for Intercultural Learning in Foreign Language Education. A Scoping Review”, **Sandie Mourão** addresses how picturebooks afford unique experiences in the language classroom and are valuable resources for culture-related activities. Presenting the results of a scoping review based on the research question, ‘What is known from the existing literature about the effectiveness of picturebooks for intercultural learning in foreign language education?’, the study draws on a corpus of nineteen documents in different national contexts and across levels of schooling. The research findings indicate that it is possible to use multimodal literature in the foreign language classroom to develop the attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and skills associated with intercultural learning, but this requires careful and skilful teacher mediation to scaffold children's learning processes.

Drawing on interdisciplinary research and international policy frameworks in her article, “Global Citizenship Education with Picture Books in English Language Learning”, **Lynn Mastellotto** examines how global citizenship education (GCE) can be integrated in foreign-language education by harnessing the motivational power of stories to develop young learners' global consciousness and global competencies across three domains of learning: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural. The article explores how story-based instruction can develop new vocabularies (intercultural, ecological), alongside reading and writing skills, by incorporating the vision and values of global citizenship education through a careful selection and use of picture books in the primary English-language classroom. Linguistic and cultural erasure, identity formation and language revitalisation emerge as central themes in two picture books examined, *On the Trapline* (Robertson 2021) and *I Lost*

My Talk (Joe 2019), written by Canadian indigenous writers. These books offer intercultural learning affordances through teachers' contextualised readings and mediation strategies to provide linguistic and cultural disambiguation and support for young learners.

In her article, “Il filo che lega il gioco nel mondo. Didattica ludica, narrazione e incontro interculturale” (“The thread that connects playing across the world. Play-based learning, storytelling, and intercultural encounter”), **Francesca Berti** examines how traditional games and toys generate emotions and stimulate imagination, immersing children in a “play frame” that involves the affective, relational, motor, and cognitive dimensions. The article describes a practice of intercultural education with traditional games, examining how, in a play-based learning setting, the objects of play make it possible to transform the classroom according to the principle of gamification: a space not usually recognized as playful becomes a space for play. This practice suggests that it is possible to recognise narrative qualities in traditional toys, that is, that these can become agents of narration.

Finally, in her contribution, “Storytelling in più lingue. Come gli albi illustrati possono promuovere un'educazione di cittadinanza, interculturale e plurilingue” (“Storytelling in multiple languages: how picture books can promote citizenship, intercultural and multilingual education”), **Gisela Mayr** presents a survey of the theoretical assumptions regarding plurilingual literary learning with the aim of promoting intercultural citizenship education through picture books. Results of a qualitative analysis of picture books from different linguistic areas are presented and key criteria for the selection of high-quality picture books for use in school contexts are identified. More specifically, the linguistic landscape of such books is analysed, unveiling how monolingual ideologies persist across a range of picture books serving as illustrative examples.

5 Outlooks

In a world shaped by migration and change, in which cultural-linguistic heterogeneity is omnipresent and taken for granted in private and public life, it is important to guide children in their first, second and foreign language acquisition and to show them narrative possibilities for mutual understanding. It is equally important to provide them with experiential stories in words, pictures, gestures, and games which can support them in this endeavour and which can be used in the process of constructing themselves and the world. Almost forty years ago, Bruner wrote: “We are living through bewildering times. [...] There are deep problems that stem from many origins – principally from a changing society whose future shape we cannot foresee and for which it is difficult to prepare a new generation” (1986: 121). The contributions to this volume point to multilingual and intercultural narrative education as a way forward in helping to prepare young people to address the complex global themes and challenges of the present age.

Though differing by research orientation and contextual application, the perspectives presented across this volume, when taken together, offer fresh outlooks that see democratic issues as central to the research on and practice of second and foreign language education and place significant value on narrative orientations. Incorporating the variety of values and visions of intercultural citizenship education in second and foreign language teaching and learning, both epistemologically and in practice, offers a relevant response to an urgent need in education and in society, to prepare young people for possible worlds increasingly marked by diversity, interconnectedness, and complexity.

For their collaboration in bringing together this polyphony of perspectives, we would like to thank all the authors for their contributions to this special issue, through which they have enriched empirical, literary, and didactic research on narrative in the context of multilingualism and interculturality. We also thank all the reviewers for their constructive feedback, which has helped to improve the overall clarity and rigour of the contributions. We would also like to thank Jasmin Prader for her support in editing the contributions. A special thanks goes to the *ZIF* editorial team for their careful, reliable, and collegial cooperation.

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