



The Learning & Teaching of Children's Literature in Europe

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The Learning and Teaching of Children's Literature in Europe is a two-year project, the aim of which is to gather, analyze and disseminate information about the current role(s) of children's literature in schools and in children's lives in Europe, focusing particularly on the 8-11 age group. This has involved a comparison of reading habits, learning and teaching methods, and the cultural place of reading, with data being gathered through surveys and focus groups amongst pupils and teachers in the four participating countries: the United Kingdom, Spain, Iceland and Turkey.

The project's purposes are a) to provide analysis and discussion of the data gathered, including recommendations for policy and best practice, and areas for future research; b) to create practical materials and training for the continuing professional development of teachers, including a number of CPD 'packs', and a web site that can act as a source for information, links and discussion, and a number of dissemination events at which teachers and others can be acquainted with the project, its findings and the lessons to be drawn from it and c) to provide a data set for use by future researchers.

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1. Project Objectives

The project objectives are threefold.

a) To gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative information regarding the ways in which children's literature is used in the four participating countries (the United Kingdom, Spain, Turkey and Iceland), primarily within the classroom but also outside school.

b) To disseminate our findings to schools, the wider academic community, and governmental and other interested parties; noting examples of good and effective practice and transferability, facilitating possibilities for international communication, and promoting multicultural engagement.

c) To produce practical materials for teachers' continuing professional development, and recommendations for teachers and policymakers about the most productive, effective and responsible approaches to the use of literature in the classroom.

2. Project Approach

In order to gather data, each partner within the project liaised with a number of schools in their own country. In the case of the UK, Spain and Turkey, the schools chosen were in the region of the partner institutions (Bristol, Murcia and Ankara respectively), while the Icelandic team worked with schools across the country. In all cases care was taken to select schools that provided a representative range in terms of social and economic class, and (where applicable) ethnic and cultural diversity.

The primary methods for gathering data were through surveys and focus groups. Two surveys were designed, one for pupils and the other for teachers. These were translated, and completed in each partner country (in on-line and paper versions, as facilities allowed) by a total of 241 teachers and 2242 children in March-April 2010. This survey was followed up in the following weeks by focus group discussions conducted with small groups of pupils and teachers, exploring further some of the results and comments that had been made in the survey.

The data gathered in the surveys and focus group discussion was subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis (the latter using SPSS), and the results of this work have are discussed in the Project Report (available at the project web site: <http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/>), which provides numerous comparative graphs and descriptions, highlights some of the more important statistically-significant findings; places the work in the context of existing research; draws preliminary conclusions about the effectiveness of different environments and teaching techniques; and suggests directions for future research in this area.

In addition to the production of the Project Report, we have produced suggestions for good practice and a number of practical Continuing Professional Development packs, featuring activities for teachers interested in encouraging the use of literature in the classroom. These, along with the project data and other information, are also available at the project web site: <http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/>.

We have conducted a number of dissemination events to teachers and other interested parties within the four countries as part of this project, as well as addressing conferences and other fora in order to report on the project and its findings. Some of these presentations materials are also available at the project web site.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Survey Data

The eight surveys that we carried out (one for children and one for teachers, in each of the four countries) is available in anonymised form at the project web site, and should prove a valuable data set for future researchers. Although our Project Report begins the task of analysis, the material is susceptible to considerable further analysis.

Report

The Project Report presents some of the salient findings from the surveys and subsequent focus groups discussions, using graphs and statistical analysis, and sets them within the context of pedagogical and literacy research. Amongst its main findings are:

- While the quality of teachers' commitment to using children's literature is generally high across all countries studied, there are wide variations both within and between countries in terms of the degree of expertise teachers have in children's literature, and the amount of training received on this subject both before and during their employment
- A reiteration of the importance of access to books outside school, and a home environment that includes books as a matter of course, for enjoyment of reading and high attainment. Younger children are highly enthusiastic about reading, but this enthusiasm must be nurtured and encouraged if it is to endure.
- A strong preference expressed by children reading about people and situations like their own – a finding with significance for the dissemination of multicultural books and values.
- An acknowledgement of the wide variations in a) teaching practices, b) teaching aims, c) flexibility in the choice of texts, between schools in the partner countries, and d) the conceptual and linguistic differences between the various countries' educational theories and practices.

Continuing Professional Development Packs

We have produced three multi-faceted CPD packs for use by teachers. These are designed to offer practical advice and ideas for teaching practice and the encouragement of a questioning and proactive approach to learning and teaching

strategies. They were launched at the dissemination events held in the partner countries in September 2011 to a combined audience of 138 people.

- The Generic Activities Pack contains ideas and activities for teachers to use with children to promote engagement with text, to develop reading comprehension skills and to encourage reading for pleasure and purpose.
- The Children's Use of Data Pack is designed to engage children with the debate surrounding the need to promote and develop young people as readers for both pleasure and purpose. It provides children with an insight into the responses of children to questions about their reading from across the participating countries.
- The 'Tinderbox' Pack provides teachers with ideas and activities for use with any version of 'The Tinderbox', by Hans Christian Andersen.

We have also produced numerous videos and Powerpoint presentations in different languages, deriving from, or illuminating, the Project's aims and activities.

All these products are available for free download from the project web site. At present the surveys are available in the languages of completion; the Project Report in English; and the CPD packs in English and Spanish.

4. Partnerships

This project is the result of a partnership between four institutions: the University of the West of England, Bristol (United Kingdom); the University of Murcia (Spain); the University of Akureyri (Iceland) and Gazi University (Turkey), with each partner taking the lead in a different aspect of the project administration. That administration has been effected through phone and email communication as well as a series of meetings in the partner countries between November 2009 and July 2011.

Each partner institution has in turn liaised and worked with a range of schools of a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in their own regions, and the pupils and teachers at these schools have been active partners in the project, both in answering the survey questions and also in making themselves available for more detailed, qualitative, focus group discussions in the succeeding weeks.

5. Plans for the Future

The Project Website (<http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/>)

The primary legacy of the project will be its permanent website, hosted at the University of Murcia. This site will continue to serve as a durable and easily-available resource well beyond the life of the project itself, offering the following to researchers and teachers:

- a) a record of the project, its methodology, and results., in the form of the Project Report
- b) a repository of the raw data (in anonymised form) from the surveys
- c) a repository for papers, presentations, etc. produced by project partners as a result of, or in connection with, the project
- d) a point of access for downloading the CPD packs
- e) a forum for discussion
- f) a hub for links to other sites dealing with the subjects of children's literature and literacy, and the project's partner institutions.

Dissemination Events and Presentations within the Project

We have held a number of events specifically for the purposes of disseminating the project findings and the CPD packs. So far these have been held in Bristol, Murcia and Ankara, and were publicized primarily to schools and universities through mailshots, email and flyers. The Icelandic members of the team made their event part of the "Day of the Icelandic Tongue" in Akureyri (16th November 2011), in order to reach a maximum audience (see below).

UK: Jane Carter, with Dr Catherine Butler and Dr Penelope Harnett. "What can we learn from our European partners about the teaching and learning of children's literature? A practical, hands-on afternoon of classroom ideas and strategies." 22nd September 2011.

Turkey: Project Workshop. 23 September in Gazi University. Keynote speakers: Prof. Dr. Hayati Akyol, Prof. Dr. Hamza Keleş and Ass.Prof.Dr. Ayten Kiris.

Spain: Project Workshop. 28 September 2011. With the participation of Dr Purificación Sánchez, Marisa López Soria, and some local authorities of the Ministry of Education and the University of Murcia. (Video available here: <http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/mod/resource/view.php?id=341>).

Dissemination Events and Presentations Beyond the Project

- Jane Carter and Dr Elizabeth Newman. "Boundaries and bridges in a European children's literature project". Presentation to the BESA (British Educational Studies Association) Conference, July 2010. The presentation is

available at the project website:

<http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/mod/resource/view.php?id=271>.

- At the Turkish Ministry of National Education conference on “Development of Reading Culture and Efficient use of Language” in Kizilcahamam, Turkey, 19 – 22nd October 2010, Dr. Charles Butler gave an overview of the project so far and Ms. Jane Carter gave a lecture about reading as well as some of the results of the project, already known. They were then joined by Dr Purificación Sánchez and Dr Guðmundur Engilbertsson for a panel session on the project. In addition, Jane Carter, Dr Purificación Sánchez and Dr Charles Butler participated in several workshops later in the same conference.
- Jane Carter with Dr Elizabeth Newman and Dr Penelope Harnett “Listening to pupil voices: the changing picture of reading attitudes in Europe” – a workshop at the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Conference, Dublin, June 2011. (Conference proceedings are available in *Europe's Future: Citizenship in a Changing World*, p. 47, available at: <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/Research/cice/2011/Conference%20Programme%20and%20Abstract%20Book.pdf>).
- Jane Carter, “Empowerment through pupil voice: the changing picture of reading attitudes in Europe.” UKLA (United Kingdom Literacy Association), University of Chester 15th to 17th July 2011. (Conference proceedings are available at the UKLA website: <http://www.ukla.org/conferences/>.)
- Dr Purificación Sánchez - "How, when and how children read". Presentation at the ICERI meeting in Madrid (15-17 November 2010). (Conference proceedings are available : **ICERI2010 Proceedings CD ISBN: 978-84-614-2439-9**).
- Dr Purificación Sánchez - "Learning and Teaching Children's Literature in Europe". Workshop at the 37 Conference of the International Society for Contemporary Literature and Theatre (ISCLT). Lovran (Croatia), 24-31 July 2011.
- Dr Purificación Sánchez - "Aprendizaje Y Enseñanza De Literatura Infantil En Europa". Paper to be presented at the International Conference of the Spanish Society for the Didactics of Language and Literature (SEDLL). 1-3 December 2011. Granada (Spain).
- In addition, Dr Sanchez has created a course entitled "Different approaches to Teaching Children's Literature", to be held in Murcia in June 2012. This has been validated by the National Agency and is published in the Comenius - Grundtvig Training Database (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/trainingdatabase/>) with the reference number "ES-2012-326-001". This course, based on the current project, will be aimed at primary and secondary teachers all over Europe.
- Dr Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir gave a sixty-minute lecture about the project at UWE, Bristol on 4th October for 45 students.

- Dr Guðmundur Engilbertsson introduced the results from our research at "The Day of the Icelandic Language", on 16 November 2011.
- Dr Guðmundur Engilbertsson was interviewed by Icelandic National Radio (RUV) on 22nd November 2011 to discuss the Project's research findings.
- Dr Kristín Aðalsteinsdóttir will introduce the results from our research for Kiwanis-women 21 February 2012.

Some of the Powerpoint presentations from these events may be found at the project website: <http://www.um.es/childrensliterature/site/mod/resource/view.php?id=271>.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The nature of the project is intrinsically cross-national, being based on a comparison of children's reading, learning and teaching in the four partner countries. The project's primary outcomes include:

- a) a report that makes a detail comparison between the school systems, social and cultural contexts, and pedagogic strategies of the partner countries
- b) a set of recommendations and strategies that have been identified both as effective and as having the potential for adaptation or transfer between national settings.
- c) a set of CPD exercises that i) make direct use of the international nature of the data, and ii) use narratives recognized across Europe (i.e. H. C. Andersen) as their basis.
- d) a body of data on children's reading and on the learning and teaching of children's literature that allows easy cross-national comparisons. This includes data on attitudes towards the representation of different cultures in children's literature.
- e) a web site with materials in several languages for free download.

This project fulfils many of the key criteria of the Multilateral Projects programme. In particular, it addresses itself to the adaptation, development and dissemination of practical and effective pedagogical strategies. It encourages diversity and respect for cultural difference and promotes multicultural learning, while at the same time being attentive to the European dimension of literacy and literature learning. The project also facilitates communication between, and the mobility of, education staff in different Member States, providing both a mechanism for views and experiences to be exchanged and, through the pupil and teacher surveys, a substantial body of data that will allow evidence-based conclusions.

7. Extra Heading/Section

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