Book review


The Great Globe and All Who It Inherit, by David Kellogg, is an outstanding piece of writing included in the third volume of a series of books which, in the words of Tricia M. Kress and Robert Lake, aim to bring “imagination and creativity to the forefront of the academic conversation around education” (Editor’s Note, p. ix). Kellogg’s research succeeds in meeting these requirements. It is well-structured, inspired and very readable, and it combines true learning and humour, a mix not often found in applied linguistics books.

The title echoes the well-known lines from The Tempest, when Prospero says that all theatrical illusion is vanishing, and so will “the great globe itself / Yea, all which it inherit” (IV, 1, 153–154). But the stuff we are made of is not just dreams after all, if, among other things, teaching Shakespeare to schoolchildren is what Kellogg’s book is also about.

The Great Globe and All Who It Inherit focuses on narrative and dialogue and how they are, in story-telling, “both linked and distinct” (p. 2). Fables, folk-tales, and two of Shakespeare’s plays, Hamlet and The Tempest, are studied and contrasted in the light of Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics and Vygotsky’s cultural-historical psychology, so that each of the sixteen chapters (the first five about stories, the remaining eleven about plays) has a ‘Halliday’ and a ‘Vygotsky’ section, plus an anticipation of the issues dealt with in the following chapter. The book dispenses activities drawn from the practice of teaching, and examples from the worlds of literature, arts, music etc., which are like a breath of fresh air in a stuffy (class) room: a classroom, incidentally, whose dwellers are Korean mother-tongue kids learning English through story-telling, and their teacher.

Kellogg points out what the complications of such a task may be: for example, publications imported from the UK, Australasia, or the US, because they offer the illusion of being more ‘authentic’ but which the children often find too difficult; or not having “one of those plug-and-play activity recipe books that you sometimes get on training courses” (p. 3) because lessons can only be planned to a certain extent; or, hear, hear! — using too much technology.

The allegation is quite challenging. The author claims that “the very finest extant technology for making sense of human experience [is] human speech” and that “getting rid of the PPT and the animated cartoon and the other paraphernalia of computerized ‘multi-media’ enables us to concentrate on more ‘embodied’ modes: hands, faces, and voices” (ibid.). It doesn’t mean, of course, ignoring the fact that schoolchildren are digital natives and cell phone addicts. Quite the opposite. Writing of second graders, for example, Kellogg quotes a story in their textbook in which a child receives a telephone invitation to go out “‘Soup or salad? That is the question: whether to buy tomatoes or to get a chicken..’” (p. 141) And why not? After all, to quote Pulitzer Prize winner Frank McCourt, “Shakespeare is like mashed potatoes, you can never get enough of him” (Angela’s Ashes, 1996).

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David Kellogg surprises his readers at every turn of the page because he loves the task (and risk) of education enormously. This, I believe, is what makes his research unique. The pages on Vygotsky’s *Hamlet*, which he wrote around the years of the famous Stanislavsky and Craig’s Moscow production of 1912, are among the most interesting of the whole book. True, I would have liked to know whether Vygotsky and Florensky’s own *Hamlet* (1905) have something in common, especially because the two were contemporaries (and suffered under Stalin, either censorship or death in the Solovetsky Islands Gulag); and I would have liked to learn about a possible link with Pasternak, too. But everything Kellogg says about Russia and the Russian language is interesting: the origins of the words for *regime* and *ink*, for the example, or the amazing вращение, a term invented by Vygotsky to mean an ‘intra-volution’, “a ‘revolution’ as a ‘turning inward’” (p. 101). It’s an uncommon word used to describe something revolving, moving round, from вращение, like in the expression “the Earth turns” (Giovanna Parravicini, personal correspondence): Kellogg applies it to a story-telling activity linked to the Bremen Town Musicians, to see “how this process of ‘going inward’ works in a classroom” (p. 100).

Of course, inside a classroom things are never quite as the teacher plans them but even “the ‘errors’ the children create are not errors at all” (p. 226), in that they have that ‘serendipitous’ principle which is central to the teaching and learning process – “only wonder knows”, Gregory of Nyssa is credited with having said, and children’s boundless curiosity is certainly a great resource in that sense. Coping with the dialogue between Hamlet and the gravedigger (V, 1, 126–137), for example, kids may well ask what does Hamlet mean by ‘Ay marry’, because its religious undertone (‘by the Virgin Mary’) is totally unknown to them, the word having “already lost its force as a religious oath” (204), by 1350. This I believe is similar to Thomas Malory’s knights swearing “on the vernicle” (*Le Morte Darthur*, Book V, 382 ff.), the *vera icon*, or the *veronica*, the miraculous portrait on cloth of Jesus which was the most important relic of Christianity during the Middle Ages and quoted, among the others, by Chaucer, Langland, Dante, Petrarch.

*The Great Globe and All Who It Inherit* ends with *The Tempest*. It would be really hard to convey the abundance of resources offered, in terms of activities (drawing maps, to-do-lists, understanding grammar, etc.) and widening horizons (e.g., Leo Tolstoy’s writings on education, just to quote one). The book is really good. Of course being a reviewer, I am supposed to point out a weakness or two now, just to create balance. I have found three. The text is so rich that sometimes it is not easy to follow the author’s train of thought, and the index / pages correspondence is not always accurate. There is also a misprint repeated a couple of times in one of the titles quoted, which it will be up to readers to discover. Enough to say that such a consonant cluster would be totally impossible in the Italian language. And that sounds like an appropriate ending for a book on applied linguistics.

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