

Global competence and literary education: theoretical foundations and critical contributions

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the results of an international systematic theoretical review of the emerging notion of global competence, identifying its potential for literary education. The sources under review are articles and research papers published in the last fifteen years and selected from specialised databases. The study shows how global competence is shaped by mobilising dimensions such as understanding multiple perspectives, communicating effectively with diverse audiences, inquiring about the world, and taking ethically responsible action, along with components such as intercultural awareness and critical literacy. In this educational context, the role of a literary education that connects students with the world, accompanying them in the discovery, analysis, and interpretation of global and multicultural issues, through children's and young adult literature, is analysed. In conclusion, it is stated that this perspective implies the revision of the literary canon and the application of methodological proposals for mediation that focus on classroom management and communicative interaction strategies based on texts.


Keywords: Global competence; literary education; intercultural education; critical literacy; children's and young adult literature.

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Competencia global y educación literaria: fundamentos teóricos y aportes críticos

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar los resultados de una revisión teórica sistemática de alcance internacional sobre la noción emergente de competencia global, identificando su potencial para la educación literaria. Las fuentes revisadas son artículos y trabajos de investigación publicados en los últimos quince años, y seleccionados en bases de datos especializadas. El estudio revela cómo la competencia global se configura desde la movilización de dimensiones como comprender múltiples perspectivas, comunicar eficazmente con audiencias diversas, indagar sobre el mundo y emprender acciones éticamente responsables, junto con componentes como la conciencia intercultural y la alfabetización crítica. En este escenario educativo, se analiza el papel que debe desempeñar una educación literaria que conecte al alumnado con el mundo, acompañándole en el descubrimiento, análisis e interpretación de cuestiones globales y multiculturales, desde la literatura infantil y juvenil. Como conclusión, se afirma que esta perspectiva implica la revisión del canon literario y la aplicación de propuestas metodológicas de mediación que focalicen la gestión del aula y las estrategias de interacción comunicativa a partir de los textos.

Palabras clave: Competencia global; educación literaria; educación intercultural; alfabetización crítica; literatura infantil y juvenil.

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Introduction

Global competence is a cutting-edge educational initiative to meet the demands of 21st century society. It requires dynamic, engaged and interdisciplinary learning to understand and act on issues of global concern. It is thus a necessary response to the new global framework in which multilingual and intercultural communication is a widespread phenomenon due to migratory movements, the development of intercommunications and world trade. In the global village created in our societies, education systems are integrated and must evolve to respond to classrooms that are qualitatively very different from those that gave rise to them. This work is within a framework that offers a critical review of the concept of global competence from an educational perspective and its application in literary didactics, to identify its potential for literary education.

A descriptive and systematic review is presented, aimed at synthesising and updating knowledge and learning about trends and lines of research in the field. The search and selection process was carried out in specialised international databases (mainly Web of Science and SCOPUS), starting with the terms “global competence”, “education” and “children’s and young adult literature”, in Spanish and English. Articles and research papers published over the last fifteen years in journals and publishers specialising in education and literary studies were analysed. Firstly, the results of the review concerning the configuration of global competence are presented. Secondly, as a derivation of the previous analysis, those referring to its connection with intercultural competence and critical literacy. Finally, points of convergence of global competence with children’s and young adult literature are identified which justify its interest for literary education.

Global competence

In 2010, the National Education Association (NEA) announced, as a challenge and opportunity for schools in the twenty-first century, the need to prepare young people to address and understand global issues in a diverse and changing world. Merryfield (1994, 1996) already outlined a global education based on the development of “knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for decision-making and effective participation in a world characterised by interconnectedness, cultural pluralism and increasing competition for resources” (1994, p. 4). This line of work has been explored since then through different proposals (Hicks, 2003; Salisbury, 2010).

The conceptualisation of global competence was initially developed by the Council of Chief State School Office (CCSSO) and the Asia Society, informed by research led by Boix-Mansilla at Harvard Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Its development was endorsed by UNESCO and the OECD in the framework of global citizenship education also linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; UNESCO, 2014; OECD, 2016). The relevance of these proposals led to their incorporation in the PISA 2018 reports (the result of a 2013 decision by its governing board), becoming one of the dimensions of the future 2030 education framework (OECD, 2018). Similarly, TALIS, the OECD’s international study on Teaching and Learning, analyses teacher preparation and responsiveness in some of its dimensions (Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, MEFP, 2019).

In recent decades, specific practices have been developed and evaluated in different education systems, such as those reported by Choo et al. (2017), including countries such as

Australia, Canada, Cuba, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Kuwait, Singapore and the United States, among others. In Spain, its emerging and still scarce development is especially linked to the PISA framework (Cornejo & Gómez-Jarabo, 2018; García-Beltrán et al., 2019; Luis-Rico et al., 2020; Álvarez-Cifuentes et al., 2021; Zubillaga, 2020; Sanz-Leal et al., 2022).

In its policy on developing global competence for American schools, the NEA (2010) identified tolerance, commitment to cooperation, awareness of a common humanity and a sense of responsibility as key elements. In its definition as “the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues” (p. 1), it highlighted four basic elements: international awareness, appreciation of cultural diversity, foreign language proficiency and competitive skills linked to creativity and innovation. In their baseline study on this competence, Boix-Mansilla and Jackson (2011) define it as “the ability and willingness to understand and act on issues of global importance” (p. xiii). In the OECD framework, these contributions are being integrated by defining it as the “ability to examine local, global and intercultural issues to understand and appreciate other people’s perspectives and worldviews, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development” (OECD, 2018, p. 9).

There are differences in approaches to this competence depending on geographical location, applications or whether it focuses on the individual or on interpersonal relationships (Anderson, 2019, p. 5). Also, as noted in OECD (2016, 2018), in addition to Western theories, it is interesting to consider related concepts from other cultural discourses, such as the South African “Ubuntu” (Nwosu, 2009; Khoza, 2011). Deardorff (2013) highlights the following key elements that converge in different cultures: “respect, listening, adaptation, relationship building, multi-perspective vision, self-awareness and cultural humility” (OECD, 2018, p. 28). In the Spanish framework, Luis-Rico et al. (2020, p. 141) propose a “Changemaker Global Competence” as a “synthesis of the global competence proposed by the OECD and the entrepreneurial, social and civic competences of the EU key competences”.

Like all competences, global competence brings into play knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Cano-García, 2008; Jonnaert et al. 2008). The knowledge relates to global issues needed to participate in today’s world. In addition to information, they require understanding, i.e. the ability to interrelate ideas, transfer and apply knowledge to other contexts, situations or issues. According to Williams-Gualandi (2005), “knowledge on its own does not comprise intercultural understanding. One can know, and continue to judge and dismiss”. Understanding other values does not necessarily imply acceptance but, as Fennes and Hapgood (1997) show, seeing them through another cultural filter, and an “opportunity to deepen and inflect on one’s own values” (OECD, 2016, p. 9). This develops an intercultural outlook based on the premise of recognising the multiple influences that shape our personal perspective and that of others (be they religion, gender, socio-economic status, etc.). Secondly, the competence approach includes the development of skills, the concept being understood as the ability to carry out a complex and well-organised pattern of thinking or behaviour in order to achieve a certain goal. Here we could list: the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures or countries; the understanding of other people’s thoughts, beliefs and feelings and the ability to see the world from their perspectives; the adjustment of one’s own thoughts, feelings and behaviours to new contexts and situations; and the ability to analyse and think critically in order to scrutinise and evaluate information and meanings (OECD, 2016). Thirdly, a certain attitude is necessary for the mobilisation of knowledge and skills: openness towards people from other cultures or countries, respect for cultural otherness, as well as a global mindset of world citizens who are committed and take responsibility for their own actions. And finally, these attitudes are structured

on values, understood as beliefs that transcend specific actions and contexts by guiding attitudes, judgements and actions (OECD, 2016, p. 5). The development of critical and analytical thinking skills and the appreciation of human dignity and cultural diversity are key filters for global competence, linking it to intercultural competence and critical literacy.

Recovering Shulman's (2005) concept of signature pedagogy, which refers to a set of pedagogical practices that define a specific professional domain, Boix-Mansilla and Chua (2016) offer a series of experiences that outline, in everyday learning environments, what we could call the distinctive pedagogy of global competence: willingness to inquire about the world, to understand multiple perspectives, willingness towards respectful dialogue and responsible action. It is these dispositions that define the main dimensions of global competence (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). Boix-Mansilla (2016) offers designs for the application of each dimension in specific routines for educational practices.

The first of the dimensions, "Investigating our world", aims to open our eyes beyond our own environment and to visualise significant issues and problems that affect societies globally. It is necessary to know how to identify topics of interest, their value and significance, developing strategies of analysis, synthesis and evaluation that make it possible to discuss, conclude and construct answers. From there, we move on to the second dimension, "Recognition of perspectives" - our own and others' -, analysing them, identifying the parameters that configure them and explaining their web of influences and variables (such as access to knowledge and technology, available resources, etc.). We then move on to the third dimension, "Taking action", a necessary step towards action based on the subject's awareness of his or her role as an agent, with action understood as personal or collaborative participation that contributes to improving conditions in a creative, reflective and ethical manner. This action connects with the fourth dimension, "Communicating ideas", building ideological, geographical or cultural bridges, with appropriate means for effective and efficient communication in an interdependent world. In short, it is about investigating the world beyond personal experience, recognising other perspectives and giving way to transformative action through effective communicative processes.

Building Global Competence: Intercultural Competence and Critical Literacy

Intercultural competence is key to the development of global competence, both for understanding worldviews and perspectives and for engaging in open, appropriate and effective interactions between cultures. In this context, global competence requires understanding and acting with difference and complexity, through research and comparison or sharing. Rietschlin (2012) states that "multicultural education puts emphasis on the local community and our relationship within our borders" (p. 50), while "global education stresses the interconnectedness with the world" (p. 50). Brown and Kysilka (2003) combine the two fields by defining multicultural and global education as:

the educational process of acquiring certain knowledge, skills, and values to participate actively in a complex, pluralistic and interconnected world society and to work together for change in individuals and institutions in order to make that world society more just and human (p. 17).

Intercultural competence has been approached from many different perspectives over a long period of reflection (Dervin & Gross, 2016; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). From an educational perspective, according to Deardoff (2006) it can be understood as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations" (p. 247); from the perspective of Perry

and Southwell (2011), as the “ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures” (p. 471). Stiptzberg and Changnon (2009) argue: “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world” (p. 7), referring to categories such as nationality, race, ethnicity, tribe, religion or region.

Theories of intercultural competence have grown in complexity from individual-based models to more systemic ones that incorporate and highlight contextual factors (Stiptzberg & Changnon, 2009, 7). Its current implementation in the field of education (Cusher & Mahon, 2009; Banks & Banks, 2004, *inter alia*) is linked to global competence. In line with the intercultural education promoted by UNESCO (2006, p. 31), intercultural competence will reinforce global competence when intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills, as well as respect for and integration into diverse societies, provide learners with the necessary tools for active and full participation in society. This broadened perspective leads us to consider the role of critical literacy in building global competence.

Literacy, as a social practice evolving throughout history, is culturally and ideologically charged, hence the traditional link between literacy processes and power. Vygotski and Freire already highlighted the value of the human being linked to the capacity to reason, understand and transform the environment and oneself, stressing the fundamental role of the context. From this perspective the concepts of “problematisation” and “conscientization” (Freire, 2011, 2012) help to understand the role of critical literacy in the development of global competence. Problematisation processes bring to the table the importance of questioning reality (unveiling or critical insertion) which leads to awareness, i.e. the ability to perceive, reflect, position oneself and act. The development of global competence applies the same perspective, and in the same vein are critical pedagogies based on learning from the posing and solving of problems of common interest, dialogue and collaboration (Lake, 2012; Kiincheloe, 2008; Rodríguez-Arocho, 2019; Ayuste et al., 1999). They thus show a way towards an education that promotes critique, equity and social action, as indicated by theories of global competence (Costa, 2006; Luke & Freebody, 1997).

In their review of critical literacy, Lewison et al. (2002) highlight four dimensions: 1) dismantle the commonplace; 2) interrogate multiple points of view; 3) focus on socio-political issues; 4) take action and promote social justice. According to Mulcahy (2008), critical literacy - as a philosophy - “distinguishes itself from other kinds of literacy in the way addresses issues of power, social injustice, and transformative action” (p. 16) and goes beyond the individual sphere (rational thinking skills along the lines of critical thinking theories) to incorporate the social sphere, which involves factors of a cultural, historical or political nature, in a network of interrelationships. It examines the impact of thought on social transformation: “critical literacy marks the use of language (tools) to exercise power, improve lives and/or challenge sources of privilege and injustice” (Comber, 2001, cited by Anderson, 2019, p. 5). In terms of textual analysis, critical literacy can be assimilated to critical thinking, from its position on the nature and intention of messages, responding to how the text works, what its effects are, under what circumstances it is produced and to what kind of audience it is addressed. However, critical literacy increases and empowers subject participation through enquiry, raising questions that place the individual or community directly facing the problem (Vasquez, 2014; Anderson, 2019). Today, critical literacy is becoming more relevant by integrating media literacy (Cassany, 2005; Cassany & Castellà, 2010) and adopting an inclusive educational approach (Anderson, 2019; Sullivan, 2017; Iñesta-Mena, 2017).

Global competence in literary education

The following is a review of contributions that justify the potential of literary texts to provide a literary education linked to the development of global competence. The key idea behind the proposals is that literature is an important instrument of cultural expression and communication, endowing the literary text with an outstanding value for dialogue between individuals and cultures. Twentieth-century literary theory also focuses on the receiver as an active creator of meaning, understanding literary reading as a plural and polysemic activity (Eco, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1995). This is the leading force that operates in literature by bringing the mechanisms of the imagination into play, providing aesthetic enjoyment and facilitating spaces of communication on which to build plural and intercultural thought. This power is expressed by Bishop (1990) through the image of books as “windows, glass doors and mirrors”:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreate by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek mirrors in books (p. 1).

The same metaphor allows Cox and Galda (1990), Landt (2006) or Rietschlin (2012) to express the cultural transmission capacity of literature. Thus, Elisa Bonilla (2008) uses this image in relation to literature, education and cultural diversity, to refer to “mirror books” from which I make my language and culture known and “window books”, from which I understand other languages and cultures. For her part, Jella Lepman (1999) used the metaphor of the “bridge” to refer to the value of literature as a means of establishing links between cultures. It also inspires the Only Connect intercultural education project aimed at “fighting stereotypes and promoting understanding, tolerance and respect for others” through children’s literature (García-Solana, 2005, p. 153). Then there is the value of literature as an integrating instrument, which allows reflecting and incorporating the multiplicity of origins, backgrounds and experiences of the students, because although other instruments can convey these aims, authors such as Stan (1999) or Jokota (1993) recall the power of literature as an experience, to live and understand other lives through fiction, thanks to the identification that occurs during the reading process:

Nonfiction books may help readers gain factual information about a culture; however, it is fiction that allows us to experience the feelings and thoughts that guide the values and beliefs of our lifestyles. By vicariously living in another culture, we begin to gain an understanding of why people live as they do (Jokota, 1993, p. 164).

Studies such as Case (1993), Jokota (1993), Feeney and Moravcik (2005), Jewett (2011) and Rietschlin (2012), among others, have highlighted the effectiveness of working with literature as a way of getting to know the other. From cognitive literary criticism, Nikolajeva (2019) analyses the importance of works of fiction for cognitive, emotional, ethical and aesthetic development, with a special focus on empathy and the shaping of mental models for real life. Merryfield (2000), Fain (2012), Rietschlin (2012) and McCaffrey and Corapi (2017) highlight the need to address multicultural and global literature in classrooms. Rivera and Romero (2017) see the space of convergence between comparative literature and didactics of language and literature as a scenario for the development of intercultural competence. In the same vein, Ibarra-Rius and Ballester-Roca (2020) call for literary education for social, cultural and political cohesion, which facilitates the treatment of diversity in its full extent.

In the web of aesthetic artefacts that constitute current children's and young adult literature, there is a series of texts that we propose as privileged vehicles for a literary education that develops global competence. In the US we thus find references to a "global" literature (Lehman et al., 2010; Rietchlin, 2012) that includes, alongside international literature, texts by immigrant authors writing about their countries of origin and by indigenous writers who bring other scenarios to the fore. On the basis of this systematisation, Rietchlin (2012) defines the global literature as "literature published abroad in the home language or translated into English as well as literature published within the United States by immigrants or American authors creating authentic representation of global cultures" (pp. 16-17).

In this group we can refer to the so-called "multicultural children's and young adult literature", which Jokota (1993) emphasises as an integrating element and vehicle of cultural communication in the classroom, defining it as that which "literature that represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail" (p. 157). Norton (1995), framing his definition in the American literary scene, noted: "Multicultural literature is literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the White Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature" (Perera & Ramón, 2007, p. 98). In the words of Marcelo (2007), "this literature presents or brings together several cultures in the same socio-historical context and with children's or young adult characters" (p. 63). For Perera and Ramón (2007, p. 87) these are "works whose main theme or setting is the culture of other areas of the world and other ethnic groups". As Marcelo (2007) points out for the European framework, this literature experienced a boom in Austria, Germany and Switzerland from the 1970s onwards, with books written by German-language authors about immigrant cultures living together in these countries.

Although there are different possibilities for classifying texts (Chovancova, 2015), our interest, beyond establishing classificatory criteria, lies in identifying some textual typologies that are particularly interesting for working with global competence. We can thus highlight a series of aesthetic artefacts which, by combining different parameters (thematic, aesthetic, cultural, interpretative...) can respond to an opening up of the canon that favours the development of global competence from an early age:

1. In the first place, we would point to folk tales and other traditional expressions from different countries around the world, which are a cultural and identity sign of peoples, and a constant reference in the bibliographies of global and multicultural children's and young adult literature. Although all literary texts, as cultural expressions, refer us to a certain culture, there are texts that are particularly marked from this perspective (Bishop, 1990). It is important to pay attention to criteria such as cultural accuracy developed by Jokota (1993), which integrates the criteria of cultural richness and detail, authenticity in dialogues and relationships, and depth of treatment of cultural aspects, among others. Lo (2001), Wan (2006) and Rietschlin (2012) also stress this aspect of the need to ensure cultural quality and authenticity in order to avoid stereotyping, an idea shared by Salisbury (2010), who refers to various studies that suggest that racial and cultural stereotypes begin to develop as early as 3 or 4 years of age.
2. Secondly, we would identify those texts that deal explicitly and from a thematic point of view with global issues and problems related to multiculturalism and intercultural relations: exile, migration, adoption, miscegenation, identity... (Quiles-Cabrera, 2015).
3. Thirdly, there are the texts of what Perera and Ramón (2007, p. 99) call "literature of difference" which, from less explicit but "easily interpretable" positions, "defend respect for

difference and tolerance”. Some works implicitly deal with identity, difference and diversity. These typologies are presented in [Bermúdez-Martínez \(2019\)](#), along with specific examples and mediation proposals.

4. Finally, we would place historical fiction books for children and young people, which, from different perspectives, approach issues of a socio-political and historical nature, from a closer reality or from a distant past. Whether from direct keys or allegorical perspectives, they allow us to delve into historical and social reality, as well as to address issues of global interest.

In conclusion, we list some of the advantages or benefits of working with this type of texts, as systematised, based on various studies, by [McCaffrey and Corapi \(2017, pp. 8-9\)](#): more motivating reading experiences, which encourage dialogue and exchange of ideas; broadening of worldviews and perspectives; boosting self-confidence through the integration and valuing of different cultural perspectives, assuming difference as a value; and deeper and more critical participation in global problems (poverty, oppression, refugees, ecology...) to understand the interconnectivity in the world and develop forms of creative problem-solving that can benefit communities, beyond the known local environment. A proposal linked to environmental awareness from the paradigm of ecocriticism can be found in [Campos-F. Figares and García-Rivera \(2017\)](#). Working with this type of literature, through the implementation of specific mediation methodologies, will also help to develop communication skills.

In addition to rethinking the creation of a canon that allows for the plurality and complexity of texts that enable us to work with global competence - a fundamental element in favouring integration and the path to success for all - it is urgent to rethink mediation strategies. Firstly, literary texts have been written to be read and not as an instrument for linguistic exercise or as a prelude to “biographical, historical or ideological works” ([Pagès-Jordà, 2009, p. 40](#)). Hence the importance of actually bringing literature into the classroom, creating spaces for reading for pleasure, which cannot be identified with mere inconsequential amusement ([Lockwood, 2011](#)). Secondly, the role of the teacher is not to impose readings and/or interpretations, but to act as a guide, proposing possible paths to follow, based on individual and personal choices and interpretations, the result of personal choices and readings. The focus of the practices is the literary conversation. In this line, we highlight the democratic and anti-erudite reading clubs ([Pagès-Jordà, 2009](#)), in the form of literary gatherings that allow for contrasting visions and exchanging, from egalitarian positions, readings of texts. We refer to specific dialogic reading practices ([López-Valero et al., 2021](#)) whose ingredients - egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, solidarity, equality of differences ([Flecha, 1997](#); [Walls, 2000](#); [Valls et al., 2008](#)) - only highlight, finally, the dimensions of global competence.

[Rietschlin \(2012\)](#) and [Salisbury \(2010\)](#) also focus on mediation mechanisms, with the teacher as a guide and the development of dialogical interpretative practices ([Rice, 2005](#); [Levstik, 1990](#)). Studies such as [Gaskins \(1996\)](#), [Mahoney and Schamber \(2004\)](#), [Sipe \(2000\)](#), [Salisbury \(2010\)](#) or [Rietschlin \(2012\)](#) highlight the importance of aesthetic gaze and dialogical interactions as ways of developing global competence through literature. [Mahoney and Schamber \(2004\)](#) argue that activities such as role-play, research and small group discussion are effective means of addressing the development of intercultural sensitivity ([Salisbury, 2010](#)). [Sipe \(2000\)](#) also stresses the importance of the dialogical approach (through literary circles, book clubs, discussion groups...) and links the aesthetic response with empathic impulses that make us connect our lives with the texts, highlighting the transformative power of literature and its role in changing the vision of reality and promoting social justice.

Conclusions

The review conducted, initially focused on the concept of global competence and its application to the field of literary education, has led to the framing of theoretical and research work, which is fundamental for understanding its origin and evolution, as well as other essential concepts for its configuration, among which intercultural competence and critical literacy stand out. Its application to the specific framework of literary teaching practices supports the commitment to open up the literary canon to global and intercultural children's and young adult literature texts, as a way of developing global competence and, consequently, attitudes of openness, respect and intercultural understanding. In this sense, our gaze has been extended to certain mediation practices based on dialogical interpretation, as fundamental mediating processes for the development of global competence through children's and young adult literature.

In conclusion, literary education, with global competence in perspective, can develop readers who are open and permeable to linguistic and cultural diversity, who are aware of the cultural complexity that characterises contemporary societies and who possess the necessary skills for its interpretation. In this sense, the conjunction of literary texts of global scope and multicultural character with specific mediation practices focused on reading, free interpretation and dialogue provide a frame of reference for the design of a specific pedagogy for the development of global competence through children's and young adult literature.

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