

Introduction

This collected volume aims to show how the integration of literature into the Italian language classroom is one of the most effective ways to teach language and culture and to develop communicative competence. The volume lays out the argument for using literature in the language class based on three grounds. First, literary texts represent a rich and meaningful input that can be utilized as linguistic and sociolinguistic patterns for the acquisition of vocabulary, morpho-syntactic structures, metaphors, similes, formulaic sentences, and more. As authentic and motivating contexts for language learning (Balboni, *Educazione, Insegnare*; Lazar; Krashen, *Second Language, Explorations*), the various literary genres (novels, short fiction, poetry, drama) offer fruitful means to demonstrate different styles and registers that serve as models for the development of discourse competence.

Second, literature provides a context that can be used for the development of culture. As Claire Kramsch argues, culture is not “an expandable fifth skill” to be attached to the other language skills; culture is always in the background from day one (1). The cultural richness present in literary texts offers a variety of sociopragmatic norms as well as diverse topics of study, which help to stimulate class discussions, reflections, and comparisons among cultures and to develop critical thinking. Indeed, learning new ways to express thoughts and social behaviors can foster a deeper reflection on one’s own culture, and consequently, on oneself.

Third, literature provides materials for making connections with the society in which the text is produced. According to Umberto Eco, a text is also the result of the author’s intentions, context, inferences and assumptions that the reader applies in order to interpret the text critically. Therefore, through extratextual references, students gain social, cultural and historical knowledge, which facilitates their understanding of past and present time periods. In addition, literature sheds light on lifestyles, ways of thinking and other social aspects represented in the story (Collie and Slater; Lazar; Todorov). The literary texts discussed here represent a cross section of Italy and a useful means to examine Italian society through a realistic lens, thus overcoming popular and often misguided stereotypes.

The volume’s communicative approach places students at the center of the learning process. As individuals who are

encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, students assume an active role when accomplishing real-world communicative tasks like conducting research and working collaboratively, which in turn contribute to their educational and personal development (Rogers and Freiberg; Lazar). The volume offers a wealth of ideas and examples from various pedagogical units: the introduction of new vocabulary and grammatical elements; reflections and discussions of new topics; development of sociolinguistic and strategic competences through collaborative and cooperative activities and exercises; and interdisciplinary as well as multimedial connections that can be adapted successfully to different levels of language proficiency. Furthermore, the volume provides instructors with insights into developing their own class materials. Being mindful that there is no single type of literary text which functions best for these exercises, readers may find these two suggestions to be helpful. 1. The selected text(s) should be suitable input for the students (taking into consideration their needs, interests, linguistic and cultural knowledge). 2. The text(s) should be used to generate curiosity, interest, discussion and critical thinking.

The articles are grouped into two sections. Section 1, with three essays, discusses medieval texts (in particular the Petrarchan sonnet and Boccaccio's novella), while Section 2, comprised of four essays, presents contemporary literary texts (novels and short stories).

Utilizing the synergy between a subset of content-based instruction and a new method devised by the author and one of her students, Kelly Paciaroni's "Sustaining Content to Sustain Discourse: An SCLT/I Approach to Transitioning into Literature-based Courses through a Study of the Petrarchan Sonnet" illustrates how to introduce a Petrarchan sonnet, along with works by other medieval and Renaissance poets into the Italian language class. While students acquire language production at the discourse level and engage analytically and critically with the literary texts, they also progress smoothly from language to literature courses. After a theoretical introduction, the author reports a case study of a self-taught course, explaining the features of her method and demonstrating its advantages to learners. By focusing on oral and written output, students can produce meaning and act on the accuracy of the form, which results in a high communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

The Petrarchan sonnet utilized by Paciaroni represents rich and complex input that stimulates students' reflection with regard to content, emotions, and ideas. Given its short format, the sonnet is also very manageable: it can be read and analyzed multiple times while also serving as a model for output activities. Applying a three-phase method to the sonnet which includes a series of guided steps, students examine, analyze, and interpret the text. While students acquire background information about the author, learn new vocabulary, and improve analytical skills and discourse competence, they also learn how to be concise when expressing their own thoughts. Moreover, as the students analyze the poem(s) through group discussions, they also engage in collaborative projects that require the use of particular morphological elements, resulting in an increasing accurate production of language.

In "Teaching and Learning the Italian Language through Literature, Art, and Emotions," Monica Calabritto demonstrates that literary texts are significantly important in improving reading and writing skills in the Italian language class. "Indeed, reading and writing promote a form of aesthetic experience that involves deep emotional responses, involvement, and social relationships." The author emphasizes the role of authentic materials to teach language, as both prose and poetry represent critical means for the acquisition of knowledge and for the study and analysis of formal textual aspects. Turning to the use of ekphrasis for pedagogical purposes in museums and post-secondary education, the author focuses on the ekphrastic relation between literature and the visual arts, while exploring the use of emotions as a connective element between the two forms of art.

By utilizing literary descriptions of visual art works paired with observations of and reflections on Renaissance portraits, Calabritto shows how actively the students participate in Italian language learning. As a result of this synergy, students are able to explore and describe their emotional reactions to the works of art in a profound way and, ultimately, to engage in the composition of poems. With examples of activities from an advanced class for MA TEP (Teacher Education Program) students of Italian, self-designed and taught at Hunter College, the author discusses poems by Alda Merini, Amelia Rosselli, Giacomo Leopardi and Eugenio Montale and employs "visual arts as a site for experiential learning as well as to evoke emotions in [her] students," integrating literature and paintings in a cohesive and successful manner.

Paola Quadrini's paper, "A Medieval Love Story: The Lisabetta da Messina Novella in the Italian Language Class," addresses the universal feeling of love. Employing a number of listening and reading strategies, the author illustrates how students can approach Boccaccio's novella in order to develop communicative and cultural competence. Students will focus on meaning and form in order to interpret and narrate the novella, while we are reminded that "interpretation of meaning should consider both the morpho-syntactic form and discourse coherence of the presented text." In doing so, students will first engage in the general comprehension of the literary text and conduct research on Boccaccio's time period and his *Decameron*, followed by a linguistic examination and analysis of given excerpts.

Beyond helping the reader decode the textual meaning, the presentation of the cultural context of production fosters reflections on and discussions about the socio-cultural aspects related to love in fourteenth-century society. Moreover, the subject encourages students to make comparisons between premodern and current concepts of love and to give their own opinions from a cross-cultural perspective. As a final collaborative project, students will write a novella set in the Middle Ages and present it to their classmates. A student evaluation of the best presentation and reasons for their choice will complete the unit.

Turning to the contemporary period, Emilia Di Martino's paper, "The Benefits of Young Adult Literature in the Italian Language Class," focuses on the importance of young adult literature (YAL) in language learning. Owing to authentic dialogues, this type of narrative provides valuable input for teaching and learning activities, through what the author calls a "collaborative work" that offers the opportunity to bridge language and literature while fostering an interdisciplinary approach to language learning. The benefits are to be seen in the refamiliarization of students with literary texts, their emotional engagement in reading, and the development of communicative as well as cultural competence. Furthermore, the students' inherent interest in YAL promotes understanding of the text and encourages discussion, while developing reading and comprehension strategies that learners can apply in a variety of situations.

In emphasizing the role of spoken dialogues in YAL as a means for providing attractive juvenile topics and motifs, the author argues that this genre helps young readers to become aware of

INTRODUCTION

identity construction processes, due to the linguistic, stylistic, and sociocultural model, as well as the descriptive everyday language used in the novels. Moreover, Di Martino contends that the use of this new fiction trend helps bridge the gap between the Italian language and literature curricula. Citing examples from Niccolò Ammaniti, Silvia Ballestra and Enrico Brizzi, whose novels are saturated with provocative topics, young adult jargon and conversational language, along with highly plot-based stories, the author demonstrates how Italian writers attract adolescent readers who value the representation of the world from the perspective of young adult characters.

Paola Morgavi's "La letteratura nella classe di lingua: una sfida per gli studenti del nuovo millennio" employs the notion that literature should be used as input in the Italian language class because it is representative of peoples' identity and culture. Thus, culture cannot be separated from language, as these two constitute an indivisible unity. Considering that literature offers various models of rich and authentic contextualized language, along with numerous and diverse topics, literary texts contribute to the development of vocabulary, oral and writing skills, as well as sociocultural and intercultural competence. To this end, the author shares her reflections on the outcomes of an intermediate university language course dedicated to the reading and discussion of Niccolò Ammaniti's novel *Io e te*, demonstrating its advantages for the language learning process.

Students learn to approach a literary text critically. As learners assume an active role by engaging with the literary text, they are encouraged to question the possible ambiguities and varieties of meanings present in the text; in doing so, they develop an aptitude for critical thinking, which will be useful throughout their lives. Personal enrichment through literature is, indeed, a major point highlighted in Morgavi's paper, because, as supported by Gillian Lazar's work, literature conveys innumerable ideas, values, and feelings that resonate intimately with students, and, above all, reach out to them as human beings. In conclusion, the author shows how her students advanced their reading skills, along with their presentational and interactional strategies, through a number of multimedia and interdisciplinary in-class activities and at-home assignments.

In "How Literature Can Facilitate Discussions about Controversial Topics: An Interdisciplinary Approach," Paola Nastri

introduces controversial topics into the Italian language class as “a catalyst for building humanistic connections” and a generator of critical thinking, knowledge, and attitudes among students. As discussions on contentious issues are inevitable in class, teachers are reminded to create an environment that is open to dialogue, respect, and sensitivity for the opinions of others. Following a few introductory remarks about the use of literature in the language class as authentic, relatable and motivating material, the author emphasizes the benefit of an interdisciplinary approach. The latter is revealed not solely as a “teaching and learning activity to engage and challenge students’ varied interests,” but also as a path to the development of communication, collaboration, presentational competence, critical thinking and intercultural awareness.

Through activities suitable for intermediate-advanced classes, the author uses Gianrico Carofiglio’s short story, “Quarto potere,” to cultivate discussions about bullying, violence, and diversity. While students acquire literacy through literature, they are also prompted to analyze and reflect on film, the visual arts, and music as a meaningful and engaging way to traverse disciplinary boundaries, to capture their varied interests, and to challenge their different perspectives. This article highlights discussion-based instruction, the centrality of the literary text, and learners actively involved in communicative and social interactions through interpersonal, interpretive and presentational activities. As students advance their communicative competence through linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic reflections, they also learn how to interpret, express or negotiate meaning in different contexts. These skills contribute more broadly to their personal and educational development.

Maria Grazia Lolla’s “Read On, Keep Talking: The Mystery Genre in Integrated Language Curricula” concludes this collection of papers with her focus on the use of the mystery novel at the advanced level of Italian language, although the author also states that mystery texts can easily be made “accessible to beginning-level language learners.” The genre’s captivating narrative has the potential to motivate students’ reading interests, while its uncomplicated syntax and redundancy of information, along with everyday spoken exchanges, make the mystery novel an authentic and comprehensible input. These particular aspects of the text are very useful for the introduction or exploration of figures of speech, such as similes and metaphors, and the connotative meaning

INTRODUCTION

of adjectives, or descriptions of places and characters, as seen in the excerpt from Elisabetta Bucciarelli's *Dritto al cuore*. Furthermore, the specificity of the genre provides social, historical, and political information that fosters discussions about Italian society and deepens the students' understanding of cultural topics and sociocultural practices.

Lolla also sees mystery novels as an effective means to have students approach literary texts. Students intimidated by classic literature may instead be attracted by the easily accessible language of detective stories or by the feeling of excitement and suspense created by their narrative plots. The mystery genre also invites thought-provoking interdisciplinary and multimedia connections to works such as Giorgio De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, Michelangelo Antonioni's cinema, or Roberto Saviano's journalism and documentary novels. As the author points out, this "can fit right at home in curricula that integrate the study of literature with the visual arts, film and intellectual history." Finally, tailored in-class activities and assignments help students develop academic language and task-based skills, such as listening to mini-lectures, taking notes, and delivering presentations.

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NASTRI – QUADRINI

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