

**Cintia Carreira Zafra**

Abat Oliba CEU University in Barcelona

## **A Report of the International Scientific Conference “Word in Education. Central Role of Narration in the Educational Context”, Barcelona, January 25–26, 2018**

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On January 25–26, 2018 in Barcelona, Spain, Abat Oliba CEU University hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference “Word in Education”, whose main topic this year was the central role of narration in the educational context. International specialists from areas concerned with pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, philology, theory of literature, education and business studies took part in the discussions and round tables, which were divided into four research areas: philosophy, ethics and theory of education; literature and literacy in education; psychology in education; and narrative and biographical methods in education.

The conference has grown under the impulse of the “Family, Education and Inclusive School” (TRIVIUM) research group, created in 2011 and recognized since 2018 by the local government, the Generalitat de Catalunya, as a consolidated research group. Coordinated by Dr. Marcin Kazmierczak, the principal researcher, its members are full-time professors in Abat Oliba CEU University’s Department of Education and Humanities and Department of Psychology: Dr. Amparo Acereda, Dr. Laura Amado, Dr. Maria Laura Giordano, Prof. Clara Guilera, Dr. María Teresa Signes and Prof. Cintia Carreira. The aim of TRIVIUM is to study the personal growth and education of human beings from different perspectives such as the philosophical, the literary, the educational and the psychological, amongst others.

The conference, sponsored by Santander Bank, was planned as the continuation of a series of conferences initiated at Abat Oliba CEU

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University by Dr. Marcin Kazmierczak and other members of TRIVIUM. The previous conferences were held in Barcelona in 2012, 2013 and 2015 and in Krakow (Poland) in 2016. The 2015, 2016 and 2018 conferences involved the cooperation of the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, represented by the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Krzysztof Biel SJ, and the University of Namur (Belgium), represented by Dr. Evelyne Charlier, Head of the Department of Education and Technology.

Noticing the urgent need for good practice in our current times of crisis, the full scope of educational implications needed to be examined. For this reason, research has been done in order to look into questions regarding, for instance, new pedagogical insights into primary, secondary and university teaching, good teaching habits, literature and literacy as tools of self-knowledge and self-improvement, the awareness of the potential of narration in psychological practice and business enterprises, and moral upbringing through arts and literature. These are some of the ideas that have nourished the aforementioned series of conferences that have been held throughout the last seven years.

The first day of this year's conference was opened by the inaugural address of Dr. David Carr, Professor of Ethics and Pedagogy at the University of Birmingham and Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh. He underlined the role of narrative, knowledge and moral character in art and literature, focusing his speech on the existence of proved moral stories than can and must easily serve as sources to access moral knowledge. His suggestions were extremely interesting and led to a debate among the participants in which many questions were asked of each other. It should be pointed out that Professor Carr was one of the promoters of the Knightly Virtues Programme, devised by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and awarded with a John Templeton Foundation grant. The programme was aimed at enhancing virtue literacy in primary students through classical stories, such as Joan of Arc or Don Quixote, and it became so successful that some primary schools included it in their school curriculum after the implementation phase of the project was over.

Theoretical sessions regarding the philosophy of education were tackled by Dr. Conrad Vilanou, Dr. Marcin Baran, Dr. Dominika Ruiszkiewicz,

Dr. Sylwia Wojciechowska, Dr. Agustina Lacarte, Dr. Robin Galhac, Dr. Alberto Filipe Araújo, Prof. José Augusto Ribeiro and Prof. Lola Esteva, amongst others. They considered the development of man's modern era exemplified in novels by authors such as Sándor Márai or Daniel Defoe, the juxtaposition between narrative identity and contemplative identity from an educative context, some outlines on the ethical formation of teachers and some insights into didactic narration and narration as the main access to moral sources. All of them evidenced a thorough understanding of those issues, which were in all cases intricated with a practical dimension. This connection between theory and practice was one of the primary goals of the conference, which was successfully achieved due to the expertise and commitment of the researchers and participants. Besides, the audience was captivated by the stimulating network of presenters.

Moderated by Dr. Marcin Kazmierczak, Professors Dr. Marcin Baran, Dr. David Carr, Dr. Francisco Esteban and Dr. Marta Gràcia discussed "how to train strong and happy teachers who would be able to 'generate' strong and happy students capable of facing the challenges of the society in crisis" at a round table event. It was a great opportunity to stress the skills and competences which they had experienced in schools as well as some abilities teachers should possess. In addition, this comfortable atmosphere allowed the audience to take part once again in a great debate, mainly because of the assumption that was pointed out by Dr. Francisco Esteban: any good teacher must demonstrate high levels of style in his or her being, which should result in good teaching and therefore impact positively on his or her students.

Other sessions during the day underlined the profound potential of resilience and other virtues such as fortitude or temperance. From a classical standpoint that pursues a return to the classical notions of truth, goodness and beauty, a broad variety of literary examples were examined and shed new light on fairy tales and short stories meant to be read by children and adults. Not without reason, resilience is said to be one of the best assets to cope with challenges and adversity. Dr. María Teresa Signes, Dr. Miguel Ángel Belmonte, Dr. Mariano Bártoli, Prof. Ricardo Coronas, Dr. Jaime Vilarroig, Dr. Maria Turu, Dr. Liliane Machuca, Prof. Josep

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Maria Giralt, Dr. José María Forment, Prof. Teresa Pueyo and Prof. María Jesús Ayuso were responsible for this upgrade and enticed one another as well as the audience to look at stories with different eyes so as to re-discover them.

On the second day of the conference, the morning sessions addressed questions related to the application of storytelling in family enterprises, which Dr. Alfonso Freire, Dr. Carmen Ruiz, Dr. Joaquín Solana, Prof. Federico Briozzo, Dr. Swen Seebach and Dr. Fernando Álvarez remarked upon by means of practical case studies. Furthermore, in terms of narrative and biographical methods in education, Dr. Amparo Acereda evoked the significant meaning of words in the updating of self-knowledge. This line was followed by Dr. Maria Laura Giordano, who suggested that words have always been a way of seduction, used even in religious traditions.

Likewise, the keynote speaker Dr. Marta Gràcia, Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Barcelona, and her research group presented their research findings on communicative and linguistic competence in initial teacher training and teacher decision making, which have been tested in a pilot study. Each of their papers delivered one key point in their assumptions, thus shaping as a whole a practical and useful instrument to assess linguistic interactions in the classroom. In the next session, enriched by psychologists and secondary teachers, there were debates on the role of visual narratives through the use of cameras when it comes to the overcoming of dramatic experiences, as Dr. Rebeca Pardo stressed, and the fostering of engagement in secondary students, upon which research was presented by Dr. Marta Oporto, Dr. María Salud Porrás and Dr. Marina Fernández.

The Vice-Rector of Research and International Relations of Abat Oliba CEU University, Dr. Jesús Montes, conducted the closing ceremony greeting and thanked the participants who attended both days of the conference from French, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish universities. He expressed his gratitude to the Organizing Committee, emphasizing that within two days, in addition to the inaugural address, the keynote paper and the round table, more than thirty papers had been presented. Lastly,

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he encouraged the Scientific Committee to continue broadening the leitmotiv of the conference, the word in education, into new and interdisciplinary research areas.

**Information about the author:**

**Cintia Carreira Zafra** is a PhD candidate in Humanities at CEU International Doctoral School and a Research Assistant in the Faculty of Education and Humanities at Abat Oliba CEU University. Her research areas are concerned with the relations between moral education, character education and virtue literacy. She also explores the notions of literary education and reading promotion, concretely analyzing the didactic applications of C.S. Lewis' fiction books.