

Meaning and Motivation in Literature Education – a Finnish Perspective

Satu Grünthal, University of Helsinki

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the role of literature education in Finnish schools in comparison to Professor Janet Alsup's key note on the situation in the US. In contrast to the rather standardized and scripted educational policies in the US, the Finnish national curricula and educational principles represent a somewhat different approach to teaching literature. However, many of the essential issues brought up by Professor Alsup, concerning the overall status of literature in education and the powerful potentials of the literary experience for young readers, appear to be the same in these two countries.

Finland has so far scored high in reading and literacy skills in the international PISA and PIRLS studies but reading habits of the young are rapidly changing. At present, the declining motivation of the youth to read fiction and their deteriorating reading skills are constant concerns in the Finnish society, media and educational field.

The role of motivation and the concept of 'the love of reading' in literature education will be discussed in the presentation. In the light of two ongoing research projects in Finnish elementary and secondary schools on the national level, the methods of literature circles, societal reading and shared reading experiences will be considered. The amount and choice of books read in Finnish schools are also taken into account.