

## **JOINING THE REVOLUTION: APPROACHING CHALLENGING TOPICS THROUGH LITERATURE IN CYPRUS PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

*C. Demetriou<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Cyprus Ministry of Education - Curriculum Development and Support (Children's Literature) - Teacher / Cyprus IBBY Board Member Nicosia*

In Cyprus, there is currently an effort to address challenging topics that are often excluded from school curricula. We find the banning of challenging books to assumedly "protect" young readers problematic, and value the work of numerous authors who address difficult topics such as domestic violence, bullying, loss, and grief. We agree with Hartsfield and Kimmel that "Supporting children's intellectual freedom requires courage and commitment, yet it is one of the most important responsibilities of literacy educators" (2020, p.426). The proposed presentation focuses on the Cyprus public primary schools' recent efforts for such challenging topics to be addressed in *Life Education* and *Literature* classes. Classic literary texts by authors such as Astrid Lindgren and Hans Christian Andersen, Greek and Cypriot folktales, as well as texts by contemporary Cypriot, Greek, and international authors, are included in the curriculum to provide "revolutionary" pedagogical approaches. The presentation is relevant to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> congress thematic sessions, as it aims to educate the agents of change (educators), providing examples of effective text selection and incorporation, as well as teacher training that empowers them to engage children in conversations about difficult and controversial topics through literature. Critical issues and challenges will be discussed, describing how teachers' professional development and students' critical and dialogic interactions are supported in order to overcome psychological, emotional, and cultural barriers. As Susan Fanetti explains, "We can make a space for healthy controversy in the classroom, despite the sometimes contentious relationship among 'stakeholders'—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community" (2012, p.6).