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English Language and Literature Pedagogy: Teacher Education Matters

Janice Bland

Teacher education for language and literature teaching has to do with the content of courses as well as how the content can be taught in the target settings – for readers of this journal usually the primary or secondary school. In many countries, such as Germany (the European country

with possibly the longest established tradition of didactics or pedagogy related to school teaching), student teachers will have specialist content from linguists, from literature and culture scholars, from education scholars and from *subject pedagogy* scholars (*Englische Fachdidaktik* in German). English subject pedagogy is the research area that makes use of the most relevant aspects of expertise from the subject knowledge areas (for example, second language acquisition, children's literature scholarship and interculturality), with the addition of the component of teaching methodology (understanding effective classroom practice for the target age group, primary, secondary or adult). So, a time-honoured institution that prepares student teachers to teach English over several years will have professors in a minimum of three areas: literature, linguistics, and English subject pedagogy. Student teachers will often additionally study at least one further school subject, and then other research areas will be involved. Figure 1 illustrates some of the areas that are relevant for English subject pedagogy.

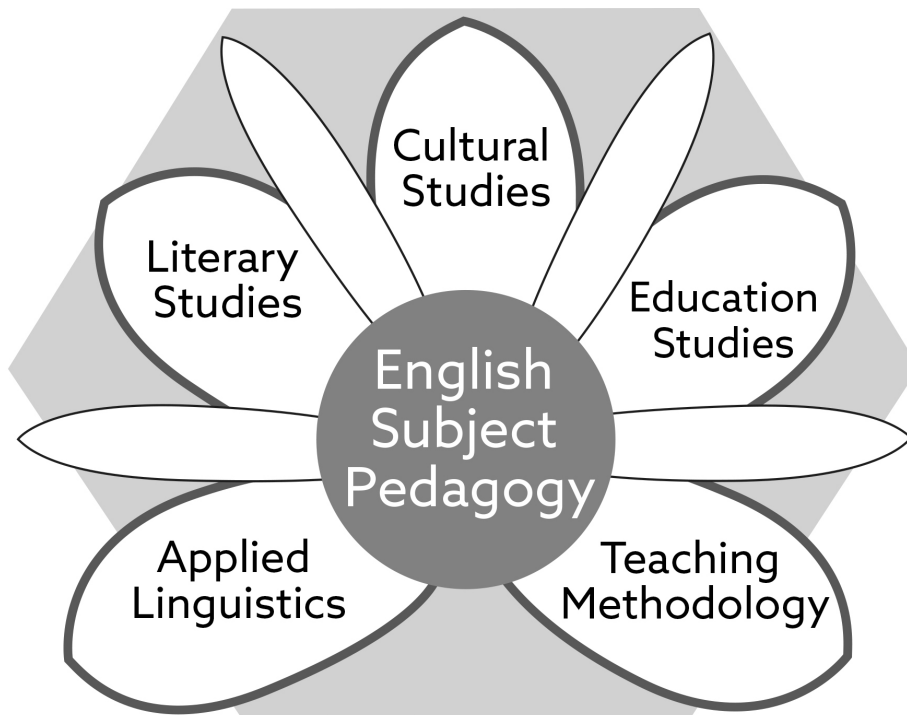


Figure 1. English subject pedagogy.

Figure reproduced from Bland, J. (2022, in press) *Compelling Stories for English Language Learners ~ Creativity, Interculturality and Critical Literacy*. Bloomsbury.

However, there are core components of the specialist field of English subject pedagogy that are not represented in Figure 1. These components are

- conducting research into primary, secondary or adult teaching (subject pedagogy scholars typically specialize in the teaching of young learners *or* adolescents *or* adults, usually because they have taught in one of these contexts themselves),
- observing contemporary teaching in the local context (typically supervising student teachers' practicum or teaching practice),
- being involved in the development of the school subject locally and nationally, in the case of ELT frequently also internationally,
- participating in conferences on language and literature pedagogy and engaging in professional associations and networks around language and literature teaching.

Most countries seem to wish to improve the quality of their teacher education, especially higher education courses for school settings. But, often in the rush to lengthen and strengthen teacher education programmes, the need for teacher educators themselves to diversify their expertise through research is often overlooked. Opportunities are frequently lacking for teacher educators to develop the important interrelation between current theoretical perspectives and classroom practice; in such circumstances, teacher education is deprived of relevance and vigour. Rod Bolitho (2020) maintains that, in higher education, 'teacher educators [are] often distant from classroom practice' (p. 5) and student teachers have difficulty experimenting in their teaching practice as they are being constantly assessed according to outmoded notions. Gary Barkhuizen (2021) refers to an 'apparent deficiency in knowledge about language teacher educators' (p. 3) and lack of understanding by institutions that teacher educators must remain current with ideas in the field: 'learning more about one's own area of professional interest, making contact and collaborating with other scholars, and continuing to develop professionally' (p. 50).

Therefore, it is gratifying that the articles in this issue help develop an awareness of teacher education issues on matters such as the selection of bilingual picturebooks and awareness of language hierarchies in language education, interdisciplinary work by teacher



educators on read alouds at tertiary level, identity- and community-building in the profession of teaching with the aid of a challenging graphic novel, and a focus on student teachers discovering the potential of stories for differentiation.

The issue begins with Recommended Reads on a topic that is still entirely taboo in some countries, while progress in other countries is rapidly accelerating in the community, but not yet in teacher education and ELT. Reviews editor David Valente introduces the Recommended Reads that aim to overcome the mismatch ‘between what children and teenagers are encountering outside of school and the content of their English language lessons’ (p. 1). Thorsten Merse, Rafaella Potestades, Angelos Bollas and David Valente describe literary texts on the topics of transgender, gender diversity and sexuality.

The first article discusses typographic design in Māori-English bilingual picturebooks; Nicholas Vanderschantz, Nicola Daly and Vouchleang San consider the relevance of the book design for the revitalisation of Indigenous languages. With bilingual picturebooks, a classroom with migrant or refugee students learning English can be supported in maintaining their home language. An additional opportunity for English language education is that the teacher may be able to ‘lead to discussions concerning language ideologies, linguistic imperialism, representation, and inclusion of languages in the wider linguistic landscape that children are exposed to daily’ (p. 32).

Vanesa Polastri, Analía Urrutia Bustillo and Soledad Martínez contribute a report on an interdisciplinary project in Argentina. The project was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, however the teacher educators turned this into an opportunity to develop student teachers’ confidence in front of a camera by having them record their reading of picturebooks aloud. The interdisciplinary nature of the project meant the educators rejected the concept of each course as a separate island, ‘since it often happens that student teachers are asked to work cooperatively and collaboratively, but they do not see this reflected in their educators’ pedagogic choices’ (p. 42).

In the next paper, Jessica Allen Hanssen describes a critical-creative approach to the graphic memoir *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel (2007) that she shared with her student teachers in a Norwegian context. Hanssen describes and illustrates a pre-reading activity on a



challenging theme related to the graphic novel as an aesthetic learning process that can contextualize student teachers' own experiences and generate a sense of community.

Regula Fuchs and Kristel Ross contribute an article on student teachers' experiences with picturebooks in the primary English language classroom in Switzerland. Their study explores the reasons why Swiss primary teachers seem reluctant to use picturebooks and appraises the potential of storytelling for employing a differentiated approach in heterogeneous classrooms.

To complete the issue, Robert Hill contributes a book review on *Literature for the English Classroom: Theory into Practice* and Janice Bland reviews *Performative Language Teaching in Early Education*.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue!

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