Book Review:

Taking Literature and Language Learning Online: New Perspectives on Teaching, Research, and Technology

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ABSTRACT

The creation of beautiful literature and art is one of humanity's most essential endeavours. The importance of literature as a component of the language-teaching curriculum has fluctuated over the last century with the popularity of various language-teaching pedagogies. Notwithstanding, it has recently seen a resurrection of appreciation for its effective utility in language acquisition. Covid-19 lockdown combined with the further progress of computer-assisted language learning has led to a gradual shift in the provision of literature-based language education to an online setting. Under this trend, Sandra Stadler-Heer and Amos Paran's edited chapter book *Taking Literature and Language Learning Online: New Perspectives on Teaching, Research and Technology* concentrates on a particular component of this transfer process, namely the interaction between literature and language learning. This book review provides an overview of this volume.

KEYWORDS

Book review, Collaborative learning, Communicative pedagogy, Covid-19, Digital learning environment, English Literature, English teaching and learning, Online teaching

Taking Literature and Language Learning Online
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The study and pedagogy of literature have consistently held a pivotal position in human's quest for significance, conveying to us what is noteworthy, what merits admiration, and what deserves contempt while also delivering the message that life is diversified (Chambers & Gregory, 2006). The importance of literature as a component of the language teaching curriculum has undergone a sharp decline during the structuralist and behaviourist periods, and was further impeded by the emergence

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of communicative pedagogy (Maley, 2012). Notwithstanding, a resurrection of appreciation has been seen for its practical utility in language acquisition (Maley, 2012), including the promotion of spoken proficiency (Jones, 2019), multimodal integration (Dominguez Romero et al., 2018) and adolescent foreign language learning (Bland, 2018). Covid-19 lockdown combined with the further progress of computer-assisted language learning has led to a gradual shift in language education provision to an online setting (Cui, 2021; Meristo et al., 2022). The exploration of incorporating online educational resources for literature-based language instruction has also been conducted extensively (Naji et al., 2019). Under this trend, Sandra Stadler-Heer and Amos Paran's edited chapter book *Taking Literature and Language Learning Online: New Perspectives on Teaching, Research and Technology* concentrates on a particular component of this transfer process, namely the interaction between literature, language learning, and language education within the framework of online instruction. The whole volume is subdivided into four parts, each dealing with a distinct aspect of instructing literature and language during periods of duress.

The first part, "Literary Responses in Times of Crisis," focuses on literary works inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic and past pandemics. For example, in the first chapter, Ingrid Gessner analyzes the stories from the New York Times Decameron Project written during the first wave of Covid-19, which he argues are not merely a record of the facts of the moment but are "figurative time capsules that defy (easy) closure" (p. 12). The main theme of these stories revolves around the issues of immobility and mobility, and many are structured in time and space, telling of different experiences before and after the outbreak of the pandemic. These stories can be seen as important insights into new conceptualizations and directions for future learning and teaching in literary and cultural studies. Furthermore, Engelbert Thaler's (in Chapter 2) assertion is that foreign language teachers are tasked with both addressing and investigating the private and social concerns that people and societies confront during pandemics via literature. The author evaluates six pairs of pedagogical methods and procedures for incorporating pandemic fiction into online and hybrid teaching and learning scenarios through a five-step approach whilst advocating for the balance between closed course materials and open-ended learning materials. Meanwhile, the author offers a variety of textual resources for instructors and academics to leverage for teaching and research purposes.

Having reviewed literary works inspired by pandemics of both the present and past, the following section (Part 2) shifts to an academic investigation of teaching literature to younger students, which contains two chapters focusing on pedagogical approaches that aim to engage young learners in online literature learning, with both centred on picture books. Chapter 3 explores the affordances and quality of asynchronous online picture book read-alouds for preschool and elementary education. Gail Ellis and Sandie Mourão utilise a qualitative methodology to evaluate the speeches during the read-aloud tasks and construct a typology for evaluating read-alouds based on the data obtained. Similarly, in Chapter 4, Theresa Summer explores how digital picture books produced during the pandemic can be integrated into English language education, particularly how they can serve as pedagogical options for developing critical environmental literacies. The author also provides concrete examples of implementing digital ecological picture books into teaching to illustrate the steps for carrying out the instructional task, which also serves as an instructional manual for other kinds of digital picture books.

The third part, titled "Literature Study and Teaching in Online Teacher Education," examines how teachers interact with their students in the online literature teaching environment and their use of online instructional technologies, specifically focusing on how teachers may remain comfortable while addressing challenges in the online setting. For instance, in Chapter 5, Christine Gardemann provides insights on teaching literature in secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and demonstrates methods for teachers to integrate digital tools and instructional tasks into online literature instruction. The goal is to allow teachers to convey their understanding of literary instruction in online teaching practices and maintain a continuity of teaching rather than requiring them to adapt to a radically changed teaching environment and different teaching methods in a short period. In parallel, during the investigation of the affordances and limitations of teaching conventional seminar content

in the digital environment and how digital tools can improve the efficiency of online teaching, Annett Kaminski (in Chapter 6) finds face-to-face classes as an essential supplement to online education and the findings of the questionnaires and feedback reports indicate that the deficiency of face-to-face interaction has a detrimental effect on the teaching capabilities of preservice language teachers.

The last section of the book (Part 4) is devoted to exploring the beauty of collaborative learning as well as tools and concepts pertinent to instructing creative literary output through online platforms. Jennifer Schumm Fauster, in Chapter 7, reviews the process of transferring collaborative reading programs from offline to online, which emphasises that the choice of online platform should be tailored to the characteristics of the target lessons and that teachers should adapt their pedagogy to demonstrate teaching presence. Similar to the findings in the previous chapter, the need for human interaction is identified as essential for language learners. Meanwhile, Fatma Abubaker and Hana A. El-Badri (in Chapter 8) assist Libyan EFL learners in their English language and literature learning through a digital English storytelling software that displays text and pictures, through which students review and collaborate to create new stories for meaningful learning. In a similar vein, Pedro Malard Monteiro, Margaret Wilkinson and Martha Young-Scholten (in Chapter 9) also illustrate the appeal of learning a second language through writing stories. The authors guide EFL learners to create short stories through face-to-face and online collaborative approaches, which promotes the reading habits of elementary adult EFL learners. In Chapter 10, Verena Laschinger presents a case study of a practical approach to teaching literature. To avoid communication delays and to engage her German students in the classroom, Verena employs *Conceptboard*, an online collaborative tool that allows all students to communicate and collaboratively annotate virtually at the same time. Verena finds this approach "pedagogically effective and philologically pertinent" (p. 214). In Chapter 11, Ludwig and Shipley propose that fantasy and science fiction are the most efficacious genres for stimulating EFL students to develop their creative writing abilities. This chapter demonstrates how creative writing class activities are carried out, featuring student works and reflections on their collaborative experience with attention to the students' attitudes. The positive results further indicate the necessity of incorporating collaborative learning into the instruction of EFL creative writing.

The afterword to this book is written by Geoff Hall. He emphasises that the allure of the book stems from the reconsideration and novel ideas inspired by the possibilities and challenges of transitioning from the traditional to digital dissemination of literary works. Each chapter provides varying examples and recommendations for each phase, ranging from the primary level to the university level and from novice to expert. Geoff also states that these experienced contributors display an admirable boldness in evaluating innovative e-learning resources and technologies to modify them to novel circumstances and individualised literature teaching contexts. More specifically, the research studies in the book encompass multiple countries and centre on the advancement of literature education, the implementation of communication strategies, the expansion of curriculum design, and the proposal of supportive teaching tools, which highlight the pioneering nature of language educators in response to unforeseen changes along with the pandemic. Furthermore, adaptive strategies with a critical and progressive outlook are also necessary for language educators to respond to the continually evolving educational environment. As change is a never-ending phenomenon, it is incumbent upon educators to take an active role in implementing advantageous and beneficial changes.

Nevertheless, this book could provide further elaboration on pedagogical practises. For example, a scenario-based summary of specific implementation processes for integrating online teaching platforms, tools and activities into the curriculum would furnish educators with a more in-depth orientation to literature education considering the extensive use of empirical research and pedagogical application within this volume.

In conclusion, this book provides an insightful look into the current digital language and literature learning environment, along with the display of literature stemming from the pandemic and practical online teaching tools and platforms. Meanwhile, the book presents extensive research covering various educational, social, and geographical settings. As postulated in the concluding commentary, educators

experiencing various phases of the pandemic will be able to discover exemplars with a comparable magnitude of expertise to their own and glean knowledge from each other. In light of the current pandemic, the transition of literature education to an online format is likely to be tumultuous, and the prevalence of communicative pedagogy in recent years has also partially reduced the prominence of literature in language instruction. However, the scholars, instructors, and educators featured in this book have not shied away from this challenge but have instead risen to the occasion, adapting their paradigms and teaching models to a collaborative literary teaching approach. Moreover, the various case studies drawn from real-life instructional scenarios provide a forward-looking reference, allowing readers to integrate these experiences and tools into the curriculum design and teaching practice.

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