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From English Studies to English Didactics: An Academic Map of Transfer for a University Curriculum

Research and critical contributions to the field of didactics are often marked by an in-depth focus concerned with the basic fields of the discipline: this includes the presentation of basic terms, concepts, approaches, or methods of fields like the didactics of literature/film, intercultural or bilingual learning, or the five basic skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing, mediation), – to name but a few. This is often accompanied by concrete suggestions (e.g. lesson plans/drafts of teaching units) of how to put the theoretical aspects into practice. This strand of contributions establishes the premises and theoretical foundations of the discipline as well as provides concrete materials and suggestions for those involved in teaching – at school or universities.

The aim of this paper is to locate and complement this established strand of concrete and hands-on criticism by a broad systematic view on curricular requirements induced by recent developments and changes in the area of higher education in Germany. Changes and developments in the context of the Bologna process and the implementation of modular programmes (Bachelor/Master) in academic teacher training have posed new and unprecedented challenges and require, among other measures, a revision and extension of established university curricula. This necessitates a systematic connection between methods and contents of academic subjects on the one hand, and the special application-oriented requirements of the field of didactics/teaching on the other. Thus, by devising an exemplary map of transfer of methods and contents of English studies to the field of English didactics, this paper contributes to the development of an academic curriculum in the field of English didactics.

LOCATING AN ACADEMIC MAP OF TRANSFER

Considering the fact that academic training of school teachers was implemented comparatively late, it may not come as a surprise that attempts at a systematic assessment of transferring English studies to didactics of English have only just begun and are still in the early stages of development. What has been a common phenomenon with German English departments in recent decades is a so-called “Abbilddidaktik”. This is the term Jank/Meyer (2005 [1996]) use for an imposing of the systematics of the academic subject to its didactics. Thus, it is an overdue development for didactics to claim curricular contents and methodology in their own right, which is now under way with the implementation of the modular programmes of study (BA/MA Education).

Another side note to this question is the fact that a systematic mapping of this transfer should be discussed within a broader perspective. The necessity of communication at national or even international levels with regard to (university) education was recently pointed up, among

others, by the president of the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers (*Deutscher Hochschulverband*, in short *DHV*), Bernhard Kempen, with reference to the failure to achieve a “European Higher Education Area” (“Europäischer Hochschulraum”; see Kempen 2012, online).

The present state of the art in English didactics is characterized by a proliferation of possibilities, contents, and methods, as well as by a prevailing ideology that favours non-directive, student-oriented, creative approaches. This openness, still strongly embraced by the school curricula, academic contributions, and as an underlying principle of methods of teaching in the EFL classroom, bears a lot of potential and linking points for a transfer of academic subject knowledge to didactics. However, this proliferation of possibilities does not only carry a potential but also causes problems and disorientation both with pupils and students when it takes the shape of arbitrariness. Thus, a competent transfer of subject knowledge to didactics necessitates a clear outline of standards of the knowledge and competence imparted to future teachers.

APPROACHING “FACHDIDAKTIK”

Despite some differences and discrepancies between academic curricula of different German universities/English departments, the outline and definition of the established discipline of English studies – which translates into something like “Fachwissenschaft” – is comparatively clear as it usually entails the academic contents of linguistics and literary/cultural studies. A definition of the contents of “Fachdidaktik” poses more of a challenge, since the concept lacks an exact equivalent in English. The range of terminology includes, for example, the science/art of learning and teaching the English language, literatures, and cultures; teaching to teach English, or simply English didactics.

When trying to map what is included in English didactics, we are facing an equally disparate range of possible approaches and, accordingly, contents. Laurenz Volkman suggests two basic strands in this field: “Wer die Pädagogik, Lernpsychologie und als Wissenschaftsansatz die empirische Forschung zu den Leitdisziplinen unter den Bezugswissenschaften erklärt, schlägt [...] eine ganz andere Richtung ein als jemand, der sich der texthermeneutischen Tradition verpflichtet sieht und damit die Philosophie und die Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft des eigenen Fachs favorisiert” (2010, 13).

Tying in with Volkman’s second line of approach, which adheres to the tradition of textual hermeneutics rather than empiricist epistemology, I will establish and elaborate three major areas of intersection between English studies and English didactics: linguistics, literary/cultural studies, and approaches of critical theory – with a focus on the latter two – as suggested by the following map of transfer:

1) Linguistics

- The Representation of Language in the Brain => Principles and Methods of Teaching English

2) Literary/Cultural Studies

- Developments and Definitions: “Text”, “Literature”, and “Culture”
- The Texts themselves: Literary History and Questions of the Canon
- Methodology/Theory of Genres: How to Deal with Literary Texts: HPO “versus” Rational-Analytic Approaches

3) Approaches of Critical Theory

- Postcolonial Theory => Intercultural Learning
- Gender Studies => Gender-Related Didactics
- Hermeneutics and Deconstruction => Constructivism

1) LINGUISTICS

Since the school subject of English usually deals with the acquisition of a second, or in some cases, even third language, the interrelation between linguistics and English didactics is self-evident. Apart from the fact that linguistics is concerned with the basic functions of the language, which are omnipresent in the English foreign language classroom (syntax, grammar, the lexicon, etc.), the discipline of didactics can extrapolate basic principles of how to teach from different linguistic areas like applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, or neuro-linguistics. Through insights into the mental lexicon, linguistics helps approach questions like: how is language represented in the brain? How is new input, as e.g. vocabulary, stored, processed, and retrieved; and – most importantly for future teachers – what is the relevance with regard to methods of teaching. In diachronic perspective, new insights into mental processes have contributed largely to the communicative turn in English didactics: the paradigm shift which in the 1970s affected, among other areas, the five basic skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing, mediation) and brought about changes of methods in favour of functional/communicative, and content-based, rather than formal and deductive approaches to language teaching (see Haß 2006; Doff/Klippel 2007).

2) LITERARY/CULTURAL STUDIES

The development of English studies as an academic discipline from English philology to cultural studies (British and American as well as postcolonial/multiethnic literatures and cultures) also went along with an extended definition of the concepts of “text” and “literature” themselves

(Volkmann 2010, 10). Literature, according to critics like Volkmann, Thaler, and Hass, in the context of cultural studies, has become part of a medial universe, which goes along with an extended definition of text/literature for modern approaches to teaching English language and culture. This blurring of the distinction between literature with a capital L and a small l, as Thaler (2008, 16) quotes Mc Rhae (1996), had and still has an influence on school teaching, and thus on academic training of teachers, in a similar way as it is the case with culture C/c. Thus both, university curricula and – with some delay – school curricula have opened up the canon to “genres” like graffiti, popsongs, commercials or YouTube clips. There have been ongoing discussions about an “anything-goes-approach” to the literary canon – which affects universities and schools alike.

In this context, schools – in a similar way as universities, currently witness an extension of the canon which includes texts beyond the dominant paradigm of DWEM [dead white European male] (Thaler 2008, 137), opening up to a variety of postcolonial or multiethnic texts. Thus, it is important for students to gain critical insights into the canon as well as reflect on and evaluate the selection of set texts prescribed by the curricula.

The list below shows the central thematic fields of the mandatory curriculum for the *Zentralabitur* in North Rhine-Westphalia (2013):

- British and American traditions and visions
- Globalization – global challenges
- Postcolonialism and migration
- Shakespeare – a literary ‘giant’ in the 21st century
- Utopia and dystopia – exploring alternative worlds

These are complemented by a list of literary set texts for the *Zentralabitur* 2013:

Roman:

- Paul Auster, *Moon Palace* (nur Leistungskurs [i.e. advanced course])

oder

- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (nur Leistungskurs)
- Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (nur Grundkurs [i.e. basic course])

Drama:

- William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (nur Leistungskurs)
- Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (nur Grundkurs)

oder

- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (nur Grundkurs)

Lyrik:

- Shakespeare's sonnets and Elizabethan poetry (nur Leistungskurs)
- Social criticism in modern poetry and songs (nur Grundkurs)

(Vorgaben zum Zentralabitur 2013, online)

The set texts cover the three main genres, however, it remains unclear why, for example, four of the set texts refer to The American Dream, but other fields are underrepresented (Postcolonialism and migration), or not represented at all (Globalization). Unfortunately, the revised guidelines for the *Zentralabitur* 2014 did not rectify these shortcomings by rendering a more transparent and balanced selection of examples, but even increased the arbitrariness, by making no specifications of set texts anymore – apart from Shakespeare:

Narrative Texte:

- 20th- and 21st-century novels
- short stories

Dramatische Texte:

- 20th- and 21st-century dramas
- film scripts
- *Im Grundkurs zusätzlich:*
- passages from a Shakespearean play
- *Im Leistungskurs zusätzlich:*
- Shakespearean play

Lyrische Texte: 20th- and 21st-century poems and songs

(Vorgaben zum Zentralabitur 2014, online)

Moreover, it is a matter of debate if it is necessary or unavoidable to predominantly include contemporary literature (again: apart from Shakespeare) in the school curricula (the same is the case with the lower secondary levels; see *Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung – Kernlehrplan* 2007).

Summing up, future teachers should be made familiar with both a representative selection of primary texts in synchronic and diachronic perspective, the theoretical and historical background and methodology to teach them, as well as a critical assessment of canon selection.

This is especially important since future teachers are required to make informed decisions concerning the selection of set texts: “[ein] ausgewogener Einsatz unterschiedlicher Textformate aus den anglophonen Bezugskulturen, angebunden an die inhaltlichen Schwerpunkte” (*Vorgaben zum Zentralabitur 2014*, online).

Another relevant aspect in this context is the methodology of how we are dealing with literary texts. In recent years, the influence of the theories of the main genres (poetry, prose, drama and film) has – in my opinion – witnessed a decline, which may still be due to an atmosphere of poststructural scepticism of formal and structural analyses. However, what is often reflected in students’ research papers or final exams is a lack of a command of these basic tools – especially with regard to the three main literary genres – which I deem essential when dealing with texts; a command of the theories of the main genres provides an appropriate starting point for whatever critical approach one applies to a text. (It is, for example, possible to apply a deconstructive reading on the basis of a narratological analysis).

In recent school education as well as academic teaching and research of didactics, one particular approach has been foregrounded, and has by now almost become a vogue word in literary didactics – *HPO* (*Handlungs- und Produktionsorientierung* [i.e. action- and production orientation]); *HPO* bears potential with regard to multiple didactic areas (such as intercultural learning) and with regard to all kinds of fictional texts. These creative and pupil-oriented methods aim to activate pupils and usually take the original (fictional) text as a trigger to deal with the texts creatively in different possible ways: e.g. by creating a freeze frame of a certain scene; fleshing out fictional characters by writing their diary entries or back stories, or doing role plays, a hot seat, etc.; this approach is often opposed to so-called “rational-analytical” approaches associated with the theory of the genres outlined above. With the rise of *HPO*, rational-analytical approaches have, even in academic contributions, come under attack for – supposedly – catering to a monolithic, formalistic assessment of literature; they have thus been superseded by the iconoclasm of the new methods. The main points of critique that rational methods have met with are summed up by Nünning and Surkamp (2008, 63); they include, for example, the reductionist idea of the text as a closed unity, whose (single) meaning needs to be elicited, as well as the strong focus on the text and the teacher, rather than the pupils.

In fact, as Nünning and Surkamp, next to several other critics, suggest, most gain is achieved from a pluralism of methods; i.e. a combination of both approaches, the analytical approaches based on the theories of the genres as well as the more pupil-oriented methods of *HPO* (69). The methodology and application of both approaches, as well as an awareness of the potential of combining them systematically rather than understanding them as opposites, is elementary to dealing with and learning to teach literature.

3) APPROACHES OF CRITICAL THEORY

As regards the critical context in which we consider texts, one of the central questions is: to what extent is it possible, or at all reasonable, to include critical theory in school education. Authors like Peter Freese, for example, have shown that it is indeed possible to apply, e.g. postcolonial concepts to literature in school, which necessitates their inclusion in teachers' training as well. (See, for example, Peter Freese's 2006 *Viewfinder* edition: *The Postcolonial Experience: Decolonizing the Mind*). As mentioned before, postcolonial literature and film have long since made their way into the curriculum. Thus, what must be transferred to academic classes in didactics is, to approach postcolonial texts analytically in terms of content as well as at a conceptual metalevel (achievement levels I to III: comprehension, analysis, evaluation/comment).

This is realized in the context of what has in the last two decades developed into one of the core competences of didactics: intercultural learning/intercultural competence, which, in the context of cultural studies, has evolved out of the concept of *Landeskunde*. A lot of the ideas and principles of intercultural learning, such as change of perspective, empathy and self-reflexivity, tolerance of ambiguity, as well as the pragmatic, affective and cognitive dimensions of intercultural competence (see for example Erll/Gymnich 2007, 149) are anchored in postcolonial theory. They relate to a concept of identity/identities which Stuart Hall famously described as "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall 1996, 6). Students of English need to make themselves conversant with these ideas, in order to take them into the English speaking classroom in implicit as well as explicit "didacticized" ways.

Another critical approach, which in the academic context has undergone a similar development as postcolonial theory but has not been equally successful in developing into a didacticized concept, nor in its representation in the classroom, is gender studies. Thus, here lies another possible line of action for a transfer of knowledge into didactics, in terms of revising the school and university curriculum: basic theoretical ideas at the core of gender studies, such as the difference between sex and gender, the biological/cultural perspective, along with different "drafts" of gendered identity in texts and gender related issues are relevant and – in a similar fashion as intercultural competence – have the potential to make students and pupils (gender) competent at affective, cognitive, and pragmatic levels. (See, for example, Decke-Cornill and Volkmann. 2007. *Gender Studies and Foreign Language Teaching*, which offers a thorough and accessible overview of key issues and topics in the field).

There are definitely other approaches, which also lend themselves to or actually are already subject to a transfer into didactics (psychoanalytical criticism, structuralism, etc.), but I consider postcolonialism and gender studies the most suited because they can be made to function both at complex, philosophical as well as concrete and pragmatic levels.

A question frequently raised in this context is, to what extent critical discourse and deconstructive approaches, in particular, are appropriate for school, at all. Critics like Volkmann (2010) and Antor (2007), for example, agree that deconstruction, in a strictly Derridean sense – as an infinite deferral of meaning – has no place in school and distracts pupils who are only just in the process of constituting meaning and building patterns. As Volkmann argues: “Damit würde lediglich intellektueller Aporie Vorschub geleistet” (2010, 15). Even a less radical/abstract, and more literal sense of the word “deconstruction” in the form of critical pedagogy is, according to Volkmann, quite difficult to match with the requirements of school education – especially at the lower secondary levels (see 2010, 16). However, it is not impossible, and therefore it is important to convey the basic ideas of critical reading and critical theory which can, probably mostly in an implicit way, be transmitted to pupils; especially since the principle of “deconstruction”, in a less radical understanding, shares basic assumptions with one of the key paradigms in teaching – constructivism.

CONCLUSION

Summing up, teacher training in the area of critical approaches should introduce students to contexts in which to put texts or interpret things, for example gender didactics and postcolonial theory/intercultural learning. Moreover, students should be conversant with the basic modes of interpretation which frame the different approaches – hermeneutics and deconstruction.

To conclude, the more open and diverse didactics and its principles are, – especially with recent trends of student-oriented, non-directive, and explorative teaching methods, the more we need common grounds, comparability, and common standards in teacher training; even more so, in view of the targets of the Bologna process. Thus, my approach to didactics of English contributes to establishing curricular standards by presenting a possible map of transfer, on the basis of which a more detailed and specific curriculum can be further concretized.

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