

“Ecodidactic Perspectives in the EFL Classroom: Australian nature and environment as a paradigm”

Andrea Gutenberg

This paper takes up the recent impact of ecocritical approaches on literary and cultural studies and investigates how ecodidactic impulses can enrich English language learning at various levels. Australian nature and especially the vast, arid outback with its tourist magnet Uluru (Ayers Rock) have been a focus of German textbook units on Australia for a long time. In the last few years, a shift has taken place especially with regard to Uluru, which is no longer presented merely as an impressive natural (and national) monument worth visiting but whose significance as a sacred Aboriginal site is increasingly being taken into account. This conjunction between a mystical place like Uluru and Aboriginal identity and memory construction, I will argue, provides a promising starting point for further discussion in the EFL classroom that can lead to the creation of environmental consciousness in learners, to an increase in language awareness and to insights into the historical and current workings of various forms of (post)colonialism. A pivotal dimension of any relationship between nature and humans, according to ecocriticism, is the subjective perception and subsequent narrativisation of places – the question how stories, myths and metaphors work to call a particular spot of land into (mental, cultural, literary) existence. Concerning Uluru, the situation is especially interesting because of the gap between the orality of Aboriginal story-telling traditions and the written forms of documents, narratives and poems that it has given rise to. Another crucial aspect is the way in which the Australian outback challenges ideas about the relationship between centre and periphery once we realise the interdependence between place and identity. The paper’s aim is therefore to explore, with reference to the Australian outback and especially Uluru, how a concept of environmental literacy can usefully be integrated into the EFL classroom and how it can further the goals of intercultural and transcultural learning.

Bio

Andrea Gutenberg is professor of English at the University of Cologne. She finished her Ph.D. in 1999 and her habilitation in 2006. Her main research interests are gender and postcolonial studies, narratology and body theories. She teaches Anglophone cultures and literatures as well as English as a foreign language and is coordinator of “Fachdidaktik” for English as a subject at secondary schools (Gymnasium, Gesamtschule, Berufskolleg) at the English Seminar.