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Literature in EAL Contexts: The Importance of Praxis in Teacher Education

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This paper investigates the impact of a literature-based pedagogical intervention on the professional development of pre-service teachers of English, emphasizing the vital role of teacher education. Grounded in Sociocultural Historical Theory, the research follows a narrative of intercultural praxis, spanning the researcher's methodology training at Michigan State University (USA) and a subsequent lecture to fifty Master's students at the University of Padua (Italy). Central to this intervention was pedagogical isomorphism, wherein senior pre-service English language teachers experienced literature-based strategies firsthand as learners, with the aim of addressing a gap identified across the first author's Brazilian and Italian contexts: practical strategies for working with literary texts in EAL classrooms. By engaging with a literary artifact through accessible instructional stages and methodological strategies, participants could internalize these approaches for future practice in English as an Additional Language classrooms. Data generated from the written verbalizations of seven pre-service teachers suggest a shift in teacher consciousness. The respondents moved away from the proficiency myth - the belief that literature is restricted to advanced learners - toward a perception of literature as a manageable and humanizing resource, regardless of the level of language acquisition. Their intentions to replicate these activities suggest that the pedagogical approach experienced during the intervention resonated with participants and informed their perceptions of future teaching practice. The article concludes that pedagogical isomorphism can constitute a transformative dimension of teacher education, fostering more inclusive and accessible approaches to literature in EAL classrooms.

Keywords: *Creative writing, pedagogical isomorphism, perezhivanie, sociocultural-historical theory, teacher education*

Teenagers are not afraid of real literature—educators are.
(MacLean 2010, p. 8)

Introduction: Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap through Intercultural Praxis

In the field of Applied Linguistics, a persistent challenge remains the "theory/research-practice gap", which Poehner and Lantolf (2014) define as an epistemological divide rooted in Western dualism. This divide often treats theory

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as an abstract discourse that is merely "applied" to the classroom from the outside, rather than seeing the two as a dialectical unity, or praxis. Such a gap is observed in the teaching of literature within English as an Additional Language (EAL) contexts such as public schools in Brazil, where the first author teaches English, or in Italy. Recent scholars have noted that the relationship between language acquisition and literature remains "uneasy", often because many teachers implement literature without a clear theoretical conceptualisation (Bloemert et al. 2019).

Empirical research highlighting this gap has increased in recent years. Italian researcher Sirico (2021) problematizes the lack of research on the specific impacts of literature on language learning, noting that teachers often feel trapped by rigid history-of-literature models or simple translation exercises found in textbooks. Similarly, Urbanski (2023) identifies a "literacy gap" where beginner and intermediate students of additional languages are often relegated to mechanical decoding, while only "advanced" students are permitted to engage in true interpretation and analysis. These challenges are often exacerbated by the absence of literature-specific training in foreign language teacher education. Luukka (2021) argues teachers often view it as a "challenging practice" or a burden rather than a tool for personal growth because literature education is frequently omitted from pedagogical training.

The present study responds to these voids through a process that we will call intercultural pedagogical praxis. The intervention we discuss here was born out of a transcultural exchange that began with the first author's teacher training at Michigan State University (USA), in 2018. This six-week intensive methodology course was attended through a scholarship awarded to public school teachers of English in Brazil, and the experience, at first, led to the development of a PhD thesis on the relevance of Literature in EAL school classrooms (Seerig 2024). Along the PhD journey, the same course mediated what may be observed as a deconstruction of traditional paradigms among pre-service teachers at the University of Padua (Italy), five years later.

Guided by Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Historical Theory (SHT) (Kozulin 1998, Poehner & Lantolf 2014, Swain et al. 2015, Urbanski 2023, Vigotski 1999, Vygotsky 1978) and its pedagogical imperative — the belief that the point of theory is not merely to contemplate the world, but to change it — this article investigates how a short, literature-inspired intervention can suggest shifts in teacher consciousness. By employing pedagogical isomorphism (Prieto & Gazoli 2020), the same methodology used by professors at MSU, the first author invited pre-service teachers of EAL to experience literature first-hand as learners, allowing them to internalize "practical tips" not as abstract concepts, but as doable mediating artifacts (Swain et al. 2015) for their future classrooms.

Thus, the objective of this work is to investigate how such an intercultural intervention could contribute to the deconstruction of the "proficiency myth" (the idea that literature is only for advanced learners) and reclaim literature-based lessons as a psychological tool (Kozulin 1998) for language development.

Data were generated from the analysis of written verbalizations provided by participants in the intervention — seven pre-service teachers, out of fifty

attendees in the intervention, who answered the form. This study suggests that even a brief encounter with a literary text can engage the aesthetic personal experiences — their perezhivanie (Vassilieva & Zavershneva 2020). This, in turn, provides both teachers and students with a move toward a prospective view of education (Kozulin 1998), where they are encouraged to be authors of their own meaning. Additionally, this research claims the importance of investment in teacher education.

For Sociocultural Historical Theory (SHT), theory and practice are not treated as separate domains, but as a dialectical unity. Thus, the following section presents theoretical and methodological grounds intertwined.

Theoretical and Methodological Grounds: A Praxis-Based Approach

This study adopts aspects of qualitative, interpretive Action Research design within a Practitioner Inquiry framework (Locke et al. 2013). This methodological choice is grounded in the dialectical nature of SHT, where the teacher-researcher actively intervenes in the pedagogical space to understand and transform educational practices. Thus, to investigate the transformative potential of this intercultural experience, this study is guided by the following research questions (RQ):

> **RQ1:** How can an intercultural pedagogical intervention, designed around pedagogical isomorphism, mediate pre-service EAL teachers' transition away from traditional teaching paradigms (such as the "proficiency myth") to engage with literary texts in their English language classrooms?
> **RQ2:** In what ways do pre-service EAL teachers reframe their perceptions about literature in the language classroom when engaging with literary texts as active learners?

The pedagogical intervention explored in this study is situated within the framework of Sociocultural Historical Theory (SHT), which posits that human mental functioning is a mediated process organised by material and symbolic artifacts. Within this tradition, we reject the dualistic separation of theory and practice, instead adopting the concept of praxis — a dialectical unity in which theoretical inquiry and classroom reality inform and transform one another.

To bridge the gap between academic methodology and classroom implementation, the intervention utilized pedagogical isomorphism (Prieto & Gazoli 2020). This strategy suggests that for pre-service teachers to effectively internalize a methodology, they must experience firsthand the same strategies they are expected to implement. By engaging with literary artifacts as learners, the pre-service teachers of English who participated in this study were able to move beyond the previously mentioned "proficiency myth" (Balboni 2018) to perceive it as a doable and humanizing instructional resource. This approach allowed the first author's training at Michigan State University (MSU) to act as

a mediating subject, facilitating a transcultural resonance that was subsequently passed on to the teachers in Padua.

We frame literature not merely as a subject of study, but as a "psychological supertool" (Kozulin 1998) that mediates human experience. Vygotsky understood art as a "social technique of feelings" (Kozulin 2016, Vigotski 1999) that engages the learner on corporeal, emotional, and intellectual levels simultaneously. By utilizing literature for prospective education, we encourage a shift from the reproductive nature of traditional schooling toward a model of "life as authoring" (Kozulin 1998). This approach posits that human conduct and the emerging self are analogous to a text in development; thus, learning is oriented toward active problem-posing and solving rather than the passive assimilation of pre-existing, standardised solutions. This, in turn, enables pre-service teachers to recognise creative writing as a vital tool for personal expression and emotional connection, evoking meaningful literacy (Hanauer 2012), rather than a mere assessment of grammar.

To analyse the transformation of professional consciousness, we treat the participants' responses as written verbalizations. According to SHT, language understood as a communicative activity not only mediates social interaction but also regulates mental behaviour. These verbalizations provide a record of how each participant refracted the intervention through their unique personal and professional histories.

The Intercultural Intervention Context

To better understand the intercultural intervention and the verbalizations we aim to analyse in this article, a brief contextualization is required. During the first author's PhD, a scholarship was granted to undertake a research exchange in another country, at another University. From Unisinos in Brazil, the researcher went to the University of Padua, in Italy, in order to investigate the experiences with literature in public schools in another country where English was studied as an Additional Language, like Brazil.

As part of this exchange process, the visiting researcher presented some of the approaches to literature in English in the context of public schools (approaches she had previously learned at MSU and had already implemented in her own lessons) to a group of fifty pre-service teachers pursuing their Master's Degree in English Language Teaching. This is the intercultural intervention we aim to describe, and it consists of two stages: the presentation of the thesis research (Seerig 2024), and a methodological session on how to work with literature in the classroom, without losing its character of Art (Hanauer 2012, Luukka 2021). Both meetings with the group were held in April, 2023, and lasted for three hours each, scheduled during their regular class time.

Based on the belief that much of the feedback we collect was not stated out loud, especially when we have a large number of participants (in this case, around fifty pre-service teachers), they were asked to answer a brief form[1] with

[1]Questions in the form (open-ended):

their impressions of the two meetings. This form was called "Exit ticket", echoing the teaching method used to collect questions, learnings and feedback from students in regular school classes. Seven participants engaged in responding, and they brought interesting perspectives, considering also their own experiences as English language learners in Italy.

The data discussed here consist of the answers provided spontaneously by these seven respondents. These responses are understood as verbalizations, that is, for the SHT, a communicative activity that mediates mental behaviour (Urbanski 2023). When the participants wrote their "Exit Tickets", they were explaining their emerging understanding of how to teach literature in an EAL classroom, and through this data we aim to discuss the impacts of the intervention.

An additional aspect to be presented refers to how this intervention was planned and conducted by the researcher. One of the important aspects in the intensive course at MSU consisted of *experiencing* the contact with literature in the same way one of our future English language learners would. This particular aspect of the course helped participants internalize their learning through living it - not merely by reading large amounts of theoretical material. This approach provides an example of what we had earlier presented as praxis (Poehner & Lantolf 2014), that is, the dialectical unity of theory/research-practice. In the same way, the intervention at the University of Padua was carried out in a manner that led pre-service teachers to assimilate how the literary text may be experienced by their learners, too, in their future lessons. Additionally, this makes the experience more memorable: a good piece of literature, when language development allows for its comprehension, is always memorable, as an artistic artifact to mediate feelings and expand human potential (Kozulin 2016, Vassilieva & Zavershneva 2020). This was a perspective the intervention aimed to address.

This particular form of praxis in which the teacher-learner experiences the activity in the same manner as their own learners would is known as pedagogical isomorphism (Prieto & Gazoli 2020). In order to do that, the poem selected was "Bluebird", by American poet Charles Bukowski (1992), as it provided very productive discussions in the first author's EAL classrooms in Brazil. However, instead of simply suggesting teachers to work with the poem, by stating its interesting language, resonance with teenage experiences, and the emotions evoked, the intervention began with the reading, as the teacher-researcher's regular language classes would. As in these regular classroom practices, the poem was given to participants as a "present" (gift) to them. Pre-service teachers were allowed to experience the poem as learners: they were first introduced to vocabulary that could cause interruptions to the flow of reading. Then, they all looked at the poem together, as the teacher-researcher read it out loud. After

1. How did you feel about using literature in school before this talk and how do you feel now?
2. Is there anything new that you learnt today? What did you like?
3. Would you find a workshop on how to use literature in the classroom useful?
4. Please make any other comments or suggestions on the quality, clarity, and usefulness of this talk. Leave your contact info or contact me, if you like!

gathering comments from the group on their first impressions, a second reading, with pauses, and an invitation to highlight particular verses that resonated more for them, provided more room for expanding the poem's wide interpretations.

This firsthand encounter with the "Bluebird" activity served as a mediating artifact of their experience with language. The aesthetic impact they felt (their aesthetic *perezhivanie*) allowed them to internalize the strategy not just as a "tip" but as a meaningful, doable practice for their own future classrooms. Having experienced the potential of this approach during training at MSU, the first author designed the intervention to investigate whether similar forms of engagement would emerge among the participating pre-service teachers.

The study shares methodological characteristics with practitioner inquiry and action-research traditions (Locke et al. 2013) since the practitioner-researcher made a proposal in order to observe prospective changes in the environment where the intervention was held. This also emphasises the researcher's self-study and the fruitfulness of a practitioner's inquiry into their own educational environment. This approach values the practical knowledge generated by teachers to improve instruction, shifting the focus from statistical generalization to the qualitative depth of professional transformation (Locke et al. 2013).

Data that emerged from respondents correspond to certain aspects of the SHT, such as the recently revisited Vygotskian concept of *perezhivanie* (Kozulin 2016, Vassilieva & Zavershneva 2020). As the creator of the term, Vygotsky defined *perezhivanie* as the "unit of analysis of a social situation of development" (SSD) (Fleer et al. 2017, p. 11, Vigotski 1999). He used it to represent the holistic unity of affect and intellect, arguing that mind and body, or thought and emotion, are inseparable (Swain et al. 2015). It is often translated into English as "experience", "emotional experience" and "lived experience" (Lantolf & Swain 2019, Liberali & Fuga 2018) and scholars struggle to find an equivalent term in English. As it is both an experience and content, it can be understood as "how someone experiences something and what is in fact experienced" (Lantolf & Swain 2019, p. 82).

In this sense, the concept of *perezhivanie* as this internal prism, a refractor of the experiences we engage in (Fleer et al. 2017, Lantolf & Swain 2019), may be considered firsthand evidence for analysing the value of data presented: each of the respondents experienced the intervention in their own particular terms, and each of their spontaneous responses configures a complete and legitimate unit of study through their written verbalizations.

Written verbalizations were read repeatedly and analysed through a qualitative interpretive procedure informed by SHT. Particular attention was paid to verbalizations indicating changes in participants' perceptions of literature, teacher identity, and classroom practice. The following section presents data generated through the intercultural intervention held at the University of Padua, in 2023. The subsequent section contextualizes and discusses the emergent categories from these written verbalizations in the light of SHT.

Data Presentation: Written Verbalizations

This section divides the written verbalizations of seven respondents into two tables that refer to the two main questions. The first question in the Exit Ticket was: "How did you feel about using literature in school before this talk and how do you feel now?". Participants are organised by number, in Table 1. The most relevant parts of their verbalizations are highlighted in bold for further discussion.

Table 1. *Pre-Service Teachers' Written Verbalizations to the First Question Following the Lecture*

Part.	Answer
1	I liked it and I'm more excited about it now!
2	Even before the class, I was aware that using literature in class can be useful, but not on so many layers. I mostly recognised the value in terms of variety of language, breaking the monotony of the class and offering something new and refreshing. **I did not know that you can work with literature even on the lower levels and that it has so much benefits in terms of emotional connection with the language, reducing language learning anxiety and also putting the focus on the students as well**. Literature helps the students to relate to real life situations and the language they will find outside the classroom and can help with dealing with topics of social justice, taking the language learning class to the whole new level. It seems to be highly beneficial in terms of practicing pronunciation and intonation. **Lastly, I was astonished with the analysis of the literature produced by the students. Writing about their emotions and giving meaning to the language is beneficial on so many levels**. Honestly, I am amazed and surprised that literature is not used more in language learning classes. There is so much you can do with it and I am sure that the ideas we covered in class is just the beginning.
3	I always felt literature is a great tool for motivating students.
4	I was afraid to use literature in my classroom. When I was a student, **I was always told my interpretations were wrong**. **So it feels like I could only do it wrong.** Now I feel more encouraged to do it and just have fun with my students working in poetry.
5	I've always thought that literature can be useful, interesting and engaging. However that was not my experience with literature because I have always felt like it was an obligation to deal with it (due to the traditional educative system we find ourselves into) and not something to enjoy both on a more immediate and on a deeper personal level. **After our talk I realized that it's possible to embrace also in an educational setting all the beautiful possibilities that the nature of literature itself brings to the table.**
6	I really like literature and I had a great experience in high school **because I loved my teacher** and she always seemed so good at her job. For this reason even before this talk I was pretty confident about using it in class. One day I will be able to teach English here in espo and I will for sure include literature even in small bits. After **this talk** I am even more confident about it and how to introduce it. **I really enjoyed the practical tips** and I will for sure replicate some of them.
7	I felt it was a big challenge to get my students interest and keep them focus and engaged. Now I **know that literature is not only the "big books", and students can approach the concept of literature itself, and get used to it before moving to the big scary literature.**

Source: Made by the author.

Pre-service teachers' verbalizations in Table 1 reveal the resonance between the researcher-instructor's pedagogical aim and the participants' written verbalizations, with a shared commitment to make English language classes

meaningful through the mediation of literature. These verbalizations can be seen as an indication of their emerging professional identities.

The second question was: "Is there anything new that you learnt today? What did you like?" Their answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Pre-Service Teachers' Written Verbalizations to the Second Question about my Lecture*

Part.	Answer
1	I'm not ready to teach yet!
2	I think I covered this in the answer to the previous question.
3	I really liked this lesson, all of the attention to teaching languages using literature **while being aware of students' interests and abilities.**
4	That **poetry can be fun**.
5	I feel like I learned a lot but what **struck with me the most is the many possibilities that creative writing can offer.** My experience as a student was quite different because **in Italy** we are always asked during Italian lessons to produce creative pieces of writing. As I kid I used to love it but then as a teenager teachers would just use them as a test for assessing our abilities with grammar, the language etc. **I remember that the first year of high school my teacher got mad l because I liked being somewhat funny in my writing and according to her it was not appropriate for an educative setting**. I started disliking writing and these few hours together made me realize again that creative writing can be about expressing yourself, your feelings and can say a lot about you as a person. **It can help you connect with emotions and people and I was able to remember why I enjoyed it so much.**
6	**I liked the "present" idea. Starting the day with a poem was mind blowing. I see myself doing that also with a quote or a painting.**
7	I really like **the ways to get students close to the concept of literature with them barely noticing it. It can be very helpful to prepare students to study and love literature**.

Source: made by the author.

In Table 2, the details regarding what participants found most inspiring — such as the "present" idea (Participant 6) and the possibilities of creative writing (Participant 5) — highlight the potential of pedagogical isomorphism. By experiencing the "Bluebird" activity firsthand as learners, these future teachers internalized the methodology as a doable and humanizing practice for their own future classrooms. The subsequent section moves beyond these initial observations to provide a structured analysis of the written verbalizations, understood as refractions (Fleer et al. 2017) of the intervention.

Data Analysis: Refractions on the Padua Intercultural Intervention

Through the lens of Sociocultural Historical Theory, three interconnected thematic shifts emerged from participants' responses: (a) the deconstruction of the proficiency myth through methodology, (b) the transformation of dramatic educational experiences into prospective authoring, and (c) the role of aesthetic *perezhivanie* in understanding literature as a humanizing gift. Together, these themes illustrate how pedagogical isomorphism may foster transformative

experiences in teacher education, enabling future teachers to reimagine both literature and their own pedagogical practice.

a) Deconstructing the "Proficiency Myth" through Methodology

One of the main reasons why public school language teachers avoid literature concerns the wide variety of proficiency levels we encounter in our classrooms (Seerig 2018, 2024). Participant 7's realization that literature is not restricted to "big scary books" (Table 1) signifies a major paradigm shift in their perception as a teacher-to-be. This mirrors Balboni's (2018) argument that the difficulty of working with literature in the EAL classroom is a methodological problem, not a student proficiency problem. The reflection on that matter is repeated by the same participant again (Table 2) when stating their amazement at working with literary aspects with "them barely noticing it".

In a similar manner, participant 5 (Table 1) stated their understanding of literature as "useful, interesting and engaging", but described their difficulty in dissociating it from an "obligation" when put into the classroom. This perceived tension between aesthetic appreciation and classroom reality reflects a common challenge in EAL teacher education, where literature is often omitted from pedagogical training, leaving teachers to view it as a rigid, traditional burden rather than a tool for personal growth (Luukka 2021). When literature is treated as an external, mandatory content to be memorized or translated, the dialectical unity of praxis is severed, separating academic theory from actual classroom experience (Poehner & Lantolf 2014). In this sense, Participant 5's words resemble the first author's perception of literature prior to the scholarship at MSU. Thus, by employing pedagogical isomorphism, the intervention provided "practical tips" that allowed these future teachers to internalize literature as a doable psychological tool, bridging their theory-practice gap successfully.

Consequently, the participants recognised that literature can be deeply engaging regardless of their students' language levels, suggesting a movement away from the "proficiency myth" (Balboni 2018). This is clearly verbalized by Participant 2 (Table 1): "I did not know that you can work with literature even on the lower levels (...)". As argued by Balboni (2018), traditional language teaching often overemphasizes denotative, everyday functional language, mistakenly assuming that connotative and emotional literary texts require an advanced threshold of proficiency. These responses suggested that when teachers deploy supportive methodological strategies—rather than simplifying the artistic artifact itself—language level ceases to be an exclusionary barrier. This realization is particularly relevant for EAL classrooms characterized by highly heterogeneous levels of proficiency, where managing classroom time, student autonomy, and diverse language levels are often perceived as major obstacles to literary reading (Seerig 2018, 2024).

By shifting their perceptions through first-hand experience, these future educators emerged with a transformed professional consciousness, realizing that

literature is a viable, humanizing, and highly accessible resource for all additional language learners. This was one of the main points of the intervention.

b) Dramatic Events and Prospective Authoring

Veresov (2017) argues that development does not happen through every social interaction, but specifically through deep, "dramatic" encounters that are refracted by the individual's prism to become higher mental functions. The responses from Participants 4 and 5 (Table 1) and Participant 5 (Table 2) highlight how past experiences with literature in their own education acted as demotivators. These past experiences can be analysed, through the lens of SHT, as such dramatic events that once shaped their perception of literature in the classroom. For these participants, the lecture acted as a mediated intervention that allowed them to re-process these past "dramatic events" (or perhaps experience a new one) and reach a new level of professional consciousness. Their expressions also reframed how literature was positioned within the educational experience, moving its conceptualization toward the realms of emotion, pleasure, and beauty—precisely the dimensions through which art can contribute to human development. This shift is evident in statements such as "Now I feel more *encouraged* to do it and *just have fun* with my students working in poetry" and "...it's possible to *embrace* also in an educational setting all the *beautiful* possibilities that the *nature of literature itself* brings to the table".

Additionally, Participant 4's fear of "being wrong" illustrates the retrospective nature of traditional schooling, which focuses on reproducing "correct" answers and is criticised by SCT scholars (Kozulin, 1998). In contrast, the intervention encouraged a shift toward prospective education, in which learners are supported in "authoring" their own meanings, instead of simply reproducing what is being imposed (Kozulin, 1998).

This can be observed in Participant 5's "dramatic event" (Table 2) regarding a suppressed sense of humor through writing ("I started disliking writing…"). This episode was recalled by them in connection with one of the final provocations of the intervention, related to proposing that language learners write poetry in the target language (one of the optimistic learnings and findings of the first author's PhD thesis). This may be very subversive as a proposal, as in traditional, formalist EAL pedagogy, the expressive and humanizing potential of writing is often erased by an overriding emphasis on grammar drills and testing (Hanauer 2012). Then the participant claims: "these few hours together made me realize again that creative writing can be about *expressing yourself,* your *feelings* and can say a lot about you as a person. It can help you *connect with emotions* and people and I was able to remember why I enjoyed it so much." In this sense, the intervention acted as a mediating artifact, and the written verbalization allowed participants to re-process these memories and recognise creative writing as a vital tool for personal expression and emotional connection. This, in turn, very much aligns with Hanauer's belief in the importance of "meaningful literacy" (2012), as he argues that poetry writing is a way of "humanizing" the classroom by putting the learner's authentic experience at the center.

The shift observed in Participant 5's impression - moving from a suppressed sense of humor to a reclaimed joy in creative expression - aligns with the findings of Vautier (2015), who argues that poetic writing in additional language provides a unique "mental space" for individuals to reflect on personal histories and reach a level of psychic comfort with past conflictual encounters (also Lantolf & Swain 2019). By treating the literary text as a site for subjective development, the intervention allowed the pre-service teachers to move beyond mechanical decoding toward the expression of the "ineffable" aspects of their professional and personal selves.

Allowing language learners to write in a freer, more poetic manner even at less proficient stages helps them develop a more affectionate relationship with language, and may even encourage them to *think* in English on their own (Seerig 2024). Recent research by Bon and Charubusp (2024) indicates that while many educators acknowledge the value of diverse linguistic varieties, they often remain tethered to native-speaker norms as the only "standard" for teaching. Thus, offering this opportunity as an EAL teacher means to deconstruct the "proficiency myth" once again, by allowing learners to explore the new language with more feeling and less correction.

Participant 2 (Table 1) commented on their astonishment when presented with high school learners' writings produced in English to the PhD thesis (Seerig 2024): "I was astonished with the analysis of the literature produced by the students. Writing about their emotions and giving meaning to the language is beneficial on so many levels. Honestly, I am amazed and surprised that literature is not used more in language learning classes". For Participant 5 and Participant 2, their written verbalizations seemed to describe a major shift in the pedagogical and personal perceptions on creative writing for these people. The reflections on the possibilities of creative writing align with the researcher's own transformation during the PhD, framing the university classroom as a site for re-authoring the professional self.

c) Aesthetic Perezhivanie and the "Gift" of Literature

During the intervention, the poem ("Bluebird") was delivered to participants as a "present". This is why Participant 6 (Table 2) stated "I liked the "present" idea. Starting the day with a poem was mind blowing." Although not being completely aware by the time the researcher adopted this nomenclature - learnt from Professor Amy Kroeshe at MSU - one can claim that this strategy of conceptualising a work of literature as a "present" promotes a shift in consciousness where art is viewed as a social technique of feelings (Kozulin 2016), precisely as Vygotsky understood it. In fact, Participant 6 considered using other works of art as a present to students. This contact with literature not as part of work or of a task, but as a moment of fruition, engaged the participants at an emotional and intellectual level simultaneously, surprising them with the accessibility of poetry and its pedagogical possibilities. Following the tradition of Hanauer (2012) and Hogan (2015), the intervention presented literature not as a static, canonical museum piece (as Participant 7 defined, "scary literature"), but as an "emotional calibrator" and a "super tool." It serves

as a mediator that facilitates the development of higher mental functions by bridging the gap between external linguistic input and internal emotional state.

The respondents' written verbalization demonstrates that the research presentation and the firsthand interactions resonated deeply with them, on many levels, as defined by Participant 2 (Table 1). This person summarized some of the main points of the intervention whilst showing the shift in her perceptions of literature in the classroom, in a way that is more aligned with the idea proposed in the intervention: "Literature helps the students to relate to real life situation and the language they will find outside the classroom and can help with dealing with topics of social justice, taking the language learning class to the whole new level. It seems to be highly beneficial in terms of practicing pronunciation and intonation. (...) Honestly, I am amazed and surprised that literature is not used more in language learning classes". Another shift in pedagogical perception is simply stated by Participant 4, who claimed that the learning was "That poetry can be fun." - which indicates a previous perception to the contrary.

All of these perceptions of the same event (the intercultural intervention) may be framed under the concept of aesthetic *perezhivanie* (Vassilieva & Zavershneva 2020), defined by the holistic unity of the subjective (the participants' feelings and understanding) and the objective (the intervention, the poem, and the classroom environment), as well as by the very individual perceptions of each participant. All, however, seemed to be oriented towards reflection on what pedagogical frameworks guided them before and after the meeting, in terms of literature and creative writing in the EAL classroom.

Finally, the first respondent's assertion (Table 2), "I'm not ready to teach yet!", is interpreted not as a failure of the intervention, but as a highly constructive "dramatic event" (crisis) (Veresov 2017) that exposed the gap between the participant's past paradigms and an emerging professional consciousness. According to SHT, development does not proceed in a smooth, linear accumulation of skills; rather, it is a revolutionary, dialectical process punctuated by qualitative clashes and crises (Veresov 2017). The participant's sudden realization of their own limitations may represent a movement from a passive, unreflective paradigm of teaching to a conscious, reflective awareness of the complex demands of EAL literature instruction. Additionally, for Vygotsky (1978), this awareness represents the "budding" stage of human development; the tension created by a multitude of new ideas serves as a necessary step toward eventually mastering literature as a mediating artifact for the classroom. Professor Novello later revealed that most of the participants' final papers in her course (Spring 2023) addressed literature in EAL, suggesting that the topic continued to resonate with them beyond the intervention.

Final Thoughts: Watering the Buds through Teacher Education

The resonance between the participants' feedback and the first author's own professional trajectory underscores the dialectical unity of praxis. These responses,

treated as written verbalizations, reveal how the Padua intervention served as a catalyst for a transformed professional *perezhivanie*.

By way of conclusion, we return to the guiding research questions of this inquiry. Regarding RQ1, the findings suggest that the intercultural pedagogical intervention, designed around pedagogical isomorphism, mediated the pre-service teachers' transition away from traditional, restrictive paradigms. By experiencing the literary-aesthetic activity firsthand, the participants moved away from the long-standing "proficiency myth" (Balboni 2018), realizing that engaging with literary texts is not a privilege reserved solely for advanced speakers. Instead, they recognised that with appropriate scaffolding, literature can be actively integrated into EAL classrooms at all language levels. The intervention thus served as a mediator through which future educators developed the pedagogical confidence and concrete criteria needed to select, adapt, and bring literary texts into their own English language classrooms.

In response to RQ2, the written verbalizations showed that the pre-service teachers reframed their perceptions about literature by participating in the activity as active learners. This first-hand aesthetic engagement allowed them to transition from viewing literature as a rigid, grammar-heavy "obligation" (as voiced by Participant 5) into perceiving it as a living, humanizing psychological tool for emotional connection and authentic language production. By experiencing the Bukowski (1992) "Bluebird" activity as students first, they internalized practical methodological strategies from the inside out. This shift in consciousness enables them to re-envision the additional language classroom not as a site of mechanical language testing, but as an engaging space for creative expression and prospective authoring.

The stated intention of some participants (Participants 4, 5, 6, 7) to replicate the strategies during the intercultural intervention suggests the potential of pedagogical isomorphism as a means to understand the experience from the learners' perspective. Their realization that students can be guided toward literature "barely noticing it" (Participant 7) indicates that the intervention mediated the deconstruction of traditional EAL myths, supporting the view that literary artifacts are viable and essential resources even in regular school contexts.

While this study offers rich qualitative insights into teacher consciousness, it is not without limitations. First, the data generation was based on a small, qualitative dataset consisting of seven spontaneous written verbalizations following a single-session intervention, which prevents generalizability in a statistical sense. Second, because the data were generated immediately after the lecture, we were unable to conduct a longitudinal follow-up to observe whether these prospective teachers actually implemented these creative EAL literary methodologies in their subsequent teaching practices. Future research would benefit from longitudinal tracking of pre-service teachers as they transition from university training to active classroom service, observing how they negotiate institutional constraints while trying to implement literature-based lessons.

The findings suggest that even a single, literature-inspired intervention can trigger new developmental "buds" within the professional identity of pre-service teachers. Since the intervention would not have been possible without the course provided by CAPES to Brazilian public school English teachers in 2018, this

paper highlights the importance of teacher education and the circular movement through which a researcher may be led from teacher training to a PhD, a scholarship abroad, and eventually to the sharing of knowledge with other pre-service teachers. Such a movement could be called intercultural praxis.

In accordance with Vygotsky's metaphor for demonstrating his developmental concept (1978), teacher education must distinguish between "fruits" (already matured functions) and "buds" (functions in the process of maturation). Authentic praxis does not merely harvest the fruits of existing competency; it actively waters the buds of future potential. In this sense, pedagogical isomorphism may offer a valuable pathway for teacher education, enabling future educators to experience, internalize, and later recreate transformative encounters with literature in their own classrooms.

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