

Place-Based Poetry Teaching for Sustainability Competence in EFL Teacher Education

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Abstract. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a central priority in various education policies, with Agenda 2030 emphasising the need for learners to not only acquire relevant knowledge about sustainability, but crucially also the competence to act for sustainable change (United Nations, 2015). Evaluations that have taken place in Sweden in recent years highlight shortcomings in how ESD is worked with in schools and have pointed towards a need for further development of teachers' ESD-related competencies as one of the contributing factors. Even when teachers are knowledgeable about Agenda 2030 and sustainable development, they might nevertheless still lack the competencies necessary to help students become independent and reflective thinkers and see their role as active agents for change. This reflective piece responds to the challenges presented by the Swedish School Inspectorate. This is done firstly through an account of how place-based learning and poetry pedagogy can intersect to support sustainable competencies within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education. Secondly, this paper showcases two iterations of a specific place-based excursion conducted with upper secondary school teacher education students at Lund University.

1. Introduction

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a central priority in various global and national education policies, with Agenda 2030 emphasising the need for learners to not only acquire relevant knowledge about sustainability, but crucially also the competence and desire to act for sustainable change (United Nations, 2015). In Sweden, this imperative was outlined in the Swedish Schools Inspectorate report (2023) which concluded that the vast majority of schools need to improve their work with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), something that, according to the National Agency for Education and the Swedish Council for Higher Education, should be integrated into teaching across the curriculum regardless of subject or level (Universitets- och högskolerådet, 2020; Skolverket, 2025a). In addition to recommending more support from policy makers for ESD, one of the key takeaways from the report was that teacher competence is critical when it comes to equipping “students with the tools needed to, now and in the future, make independent and reflected choices in various

sustainability issues” (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2023, p.1). Even when teachers are knowledgeable about Agenda 2030 and sustainable development, they may still need opportunities to further develop the competencies required to help students become independent and reflective thinkers and see their role as active agents for change. This reflective piece responds to the challenges presented by the Swedish School Inspectorate. This is done firstly through an account of how place-based learning and poetry pedagogy can intersect to support sustainable competencies within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education. Secondly, this paper showcases two iterations of a specific place-based excursion conducted with upper secondary school teacher education students at a university in Sweden.

At least in our own experiences of teaching literary studies (including poetry) in an EFL teacher education context, we have been very much confined to the four walls of the classroom. The rare exceptions to this might be, for example, when an unexpected fire drill has forced us onto the green space outside of our building and the class discussion has spilled over with us. These unplanned occasions stand in stark contrast to the kind of carefully crafted activities that we design in more conscious place-based activities, but nevertheless do give us an insight into the kinds of potentials that exist when we take ourselves to spaces beyond the classroom. Literature on place-based education supports this sense of possibilities, showing that different environments such as parks, museums, and historical sites can strengthen learning outcomes in various disciplines ranging from arts and literary studies to STEM fields (Domenici, 2022; Eggensen & Barfod, 2020).

The concept of place-based learning is not new and has its origins with the oft-cited American educational reformer John Dewey back in the early-twentieth century. In more recent years the Covid-19 pandemic has, according to Yemini et al. (2023), expedited various innovative pedagogies that resulted from being forced outside of the classroom. There is, however, as McInerney, Smyth, & Down (2011) point out, a notable gap in critical approaches to place-based learning in teacher education programmes that still stands despite ongoing work in the intervening decade or so. This gap is particularly apparent in the subject of English as a foreign language (EFL) in teacher education.

This present paper explores how place-based learning can address the intersection of curricular goals related to sustainable competencies and literary analysis in EFL education. It begins by

reviewing the policy document requirements to integrate sustainability into school and university education in Sweden, and from here presents place-based learning as an apt pedagogical tool to achieve curricular aims within English literature education on teacher education programmes. However, as Gruenewald and Smith (2014) remind us, “[b]y its very nature, place-based education is not something that can be packaged and then disseminated” (p. 4). Building on this call to attend to the specific possibilities arbitrated by local contexts, this present paper concludes by describing one highly contextualised example in which we report on several iterations of an excursion that took place to Lund’s Botanical Garden. Picking up where Kleppe left off in her chapter “Hanging on for the Bees: Teaching with Sylvia Plath’s Bee Poems” (2022), we describe how, in the first iteration of the excursion activity, students worked with a poem from Plath’s famous bee sequence in small groups while strolling in the grounds. In the second and slightly expanded iteration, students worked with one of two of Louise Glück’s poems from her 1992 collection *Wild Iris*. As well as outlining our model in both of these iterations, we offer reflections on the activities.

2. Contextualising ESD in Swedish Upper Secondary Education in the Subject of English

Education for sustainable development can be broadly defined as “any formal, informal, or nonformal education that empowers people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable society” (Wright, 2014). This broad definition emphasises how ESD is not confined to one place or subject, but rather happens *everywhere*, and this is reflected in the cross-curricular mandate for the inclusion of ESD in Swedish education. The National Agency for Education also explicitly mentions action competence; pupils should be equipped with the skills to act for sustainability beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge (Skolverket, 2025a). In the context of upper secondary school education in Sweden, this broad mandate appears in the recent 2025 curriculum for Swedish upper secondary education (Gy25) and is expressed in the following statement: “Everyone working in the school shall also promote respect for the inherent value of every human being and for our shared environment” (Skolverket, 2025a, authors’ translation).¹ Various components in the mission statement for upper secondary education can be connected to the goals of ESD, for instance in directives centred on ethical perspectives in

¹ “Var och en som verkar inom skolan ska också främja aktning för varje människas egenvärde och respekt för vår gemensamma miljö” (Original Swedish).

teaching which should “provide a basis for, and promote pupils’ ability to make personal decisions and act responsibly towards themselves and others” (Skolverket, 2025a, authors’ translation).² The connection to ESD is even more explicit in the directive to include an environmental perspective in education which should

give students insights enabling them both to contribute to preventing harmful environmental impact and to develop a personal approach to overarching and global environmental issues. Teaching shall illuminate how society’s functions and our ways of living and working can be adapted to create sustainable development. (Skolverket, 2025a, authors’ translation).³

At the scale of the English syllabus for upper secondary school, direct mentions of environmental sustainability are absent, but connections to ESD more broadly conceived are apparent in, for instance, engagement in social and ethical issues, and in building competencies associated with social participation (Skolverket 2025b). These directives relate closely to the development of various competencies necessary in ESD, including those associated with values thinking and the ability to “differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic values in the social and natural world” and “to identify and clarify one’s own values” (Brundiers et al., 2021, p. 22).

Similar values are also inscribed in the Higher Education Ordinance which mandates that professional degree programmes for subject teachers should equip teachers with the ability to “make judgements in educational work based on relevant scientific, societal, and ethical aspects” with sustainable development being explicitly flagged (Riksdagen, 1993, authors’ translation).⁴ This learning outcome appears in the programme syllabus for our subject teacher education students along with the mandate that students, on completion of their degree, should be able to contribute to the general aim of schools to promote active citizenship (Lunds universitet, 2024).

² “ge en grund för och främja elevernas förmåga att göra personliga ställningstaganden och agera ansvarsfullt mot sig själva och andra” (Original Swedish).

³ “ge eleverna insikter så att de kan dels själva medverka till att hindra skadlig miljöpåverkan, dels skaffa sig ett personligt förhållningssätt till de övergripande och globala miljöfrågorna. Undervisningen ska belysa hur samhällets funktioner och vårt sätt att leva och arbeta kan anpassas för att skapa hållbar utveckling” (Original Swedish).

⁴ “förmåga att i det pedagogiska arbetet göra bedömningar utifrån relevanta vetenskapliga, samhällliga och etiska aspekter” (Original Swedish).

3. Place-based education and sustainability

According to David Sobel's key work in the subject, *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities*, the pedagogical approach is characterised by "[t]he process of using local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum" (2004, p. 7). There are of course numerous possibilities inherent in Sobel's definition, and this is a large part of the appeal of place-based pedagogies. Despite the range of shapes and forms that place-based approaches can take, Smith (2002) identifies five common elements: 1) that the "phenomena" in the "immediate" vicinity form the "foundation of curriculum development"; 2) that learners are encouraged "to become the creators of knowledge rather than the consumers of knowledge created by others"; 3) that "students' questions and concerns play a central role in determining what is studied"; 4) that the teachers' role is to "act as experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities"; and 5) that "the wall between school and community becomes much more permeable and is crossed with frequency" (p. 593).

Research has consistently shown that when individuals feel connected to their immediate locales, they are more likely to take action for a sustainable future (Khadka et al., 2021; Howarth et al., 2024). Place-based education is one proven approach for forging this necessary connection with pedagogical interventions that facilitate the interaction between individuals and the environment contributing to a more meaningful relationship to the world around them (Deringer, 2017; Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald, 2004; Roze des Ordons & Hill, 2025). While there is strong evidence that place-based education can create possibilities for dynamic engagement with the external world, there are few studies which have focused on literary texts and how interpretations and affective responses may change when literature is encountered beyond the classroom (Bishop, 2004; Eggensen, 2024). This is further evidenced in Yemini et al. (2023) who, in their systematic literature review of English language peer-reviewed articles on place-based education published between 2002 and 2022, found that research tends to be concentrated around science and environmental education, with other subjects, including English, receiving substantially less attention.

Furthermore, there is a clear dearth of previous research that explores poetry education in a place-based context. In one of the few extant studies on place-based poetry pedagogy (in this case, with teacher education students in Singapore), Loh (2018) comes to the conclusion that

the study of literature should engage with both the global and the local, and that in studying (in particular), local literatures, “students need to explore local places in order to understand better the issues that underlie the poetry and place” (p. 206). Brown (2021) similarly explores the possibilities of poetry to generate a better sense of connection with the local, this time through utilising creative poetry practices with secondary-school geography students. Our pedagogical work builds on these works to show how bringing poetry that is of a more global character can help us to understand better our immediate environments, and vice-versa, how gaining a stronger connection with the local can help us to understand environmental concerns on a global level.

4. Walking and talking about poetry in Lund’s Botanical Garden

In the above, we have mapped how ESD is embedded throughout education policy in Sweden, arriving at our specific context: upper secondary teacher education. We have also briefly charted how theoretical perspectives position place-based poetry pedagogy as a productive site for developing the sustainability competencies emphasised in Swedish education policy. The following builds on these insights, presenting how two iterations of an activity centred on a collaborative close reading of poetry (Plath in the first instance and Glück in the second), conducted in Lund’s Botanical Garden, can support students in cultivating the action- and values-based sustainability competencies invoked in Gy25, the English syllabi, and the Higher Education Ordinance.

We have been working to integrate ESD into our English subject courses, and the results we present here are based on work that we have done on second semester English literature module which focuses on modern and contemporary literature with theoretical perspectives which have been chosen for their connection to various Skolverket directives. Our first-semester introduction to literary studies module worked to familiarise teacher education students with poetry and sustainability, drawing heavily on Robert J. Didham’s (2022) “Poetic Learning for a Sustainable Future” and its emphasis on democratic dialogue as key to sustainability competencies. Building on this work (Barrow & Turner, 2025), the module which is the focus of this present paper explores how we have taken poetry outside of the classroom in an activity

which showcases how place-based education can help “develop a personal approach to overarching and global environmental issues” (Skolverket, 2025a, authors’ translation).⁵

4.1 Iteration 1: Plath

The particular activity that we describe here is an expansion of Kleppe’s (2022) proposed activities for working with Sylvia Plath’s five-poem bee sequence which were written shortly before her death and published posthumously in *Ariel* (1965). Plath’s bee poems have been extensively discussed in literary scholarship (see for example Chakraborty, 2021; Luck, 2007; Rogers & Sleigh, 2012). Kleppe (2022) writes that “[t]he language of flowers in Plath’s bee sequence is particular to her personal poetic idiom: it expresses her intimate knowledge of bees, her fear/fascination and intermingling with them, and ultimately her speaker’s citizenship in the bee matriarchy” (p. 37). We were inspired by Kleppe’s remarks that “the close reading skills that we learn by reading line for line and pausing on every detail mirror and bolster the close reading skills that are required for the non-invasive study of our ecosystems” (p. 41). This ethos was fundamental to our working with poetry and sustainability since close attention to poetry facilitates a better understanding of the world around us, and a better understanding of the world around us facilitates a better understanding of poetry.

In the first iteration of our place-based excursion, we stuck closely to Kleppe’s suggested pre-activities for working with Plath, but the novelty of our approach is that we moved the collective discussions outside into a space populated with flowers and bees, namely Lund’s Botanical Garden, which stands in convenient proximity, only a ten-minute walk from to our teaching premises. The site of the botanical garden was chosen for its suitability for examining the diverse and intricate ways that humans relate to the more-than-human world (Neves, 2009). These spaces, often seen as “the calling card of nature in cities” (Wen et al. 2026, p. 1) are helpful in terms of thinking about humanity “as part of nature rather than separated from it” (Cowell et al., 2022) and have been shown to help forge our connection to ecosystems (Sanders et. al., 2018). These factors resonate strongly with certain themes in Plath’s bee sequence which draw on the complex interdependencies that human-to-human, bee-to-bee, and human-bee networks rely upon, with the speaker’s identity at times being conflated with those of the bees themselves (Rogers & Sleigh, 2012).

⁵ “skaffa sig ett personligt förhållningssätt till de övergripande och globala miljöfrågorna” (Original Swedish).

In the following we outline how the two-hour place-based excursion to Lund's Botanical Garden was organised. Inspired by Kleppe (2022) we asked students to complete a creative activity with the goal of supporting a more intimate relationship with bees and the flowers they visit. They could, for instance research and draw local bees/flowers, write their own poem about bees, take photos, or make a collage of photos and images from magazines and newspaper of bees/flowers. Given that it was spring and flowers were beginning to come into bloom, this was an apt season in which to be contemplating this subject matter. They were also asked to read two of Plath's bee sequence poems, "Wintering" and "Stings". On the day of the excursion, we convened in the classroom where the activity was introduced. We shared knowledge about what we knew about bees, flowers and their important roles in the ecosystem, and there was some brief introduction to Plath and the bee sequence. Students were then placed in small groups with whom they would walk to the site and spend an hour strolling in the grounds to discuss.

The focus of the excursion was to explore what happens when students performed a collaborative close reading of one of (or both) of the two Plath poems, outside of the classroom and in amongst the flowers and the bees. A worksheet was provided to students to guide their discussion. A warm-up question asked students to reflect on their personal experience of having completed one of the creative pre-activities in terms of their own relationship to the world of flowers and their pollinators, and to the two Plath poems. They were also asked to reflect broadly on how Plath's poems interact with the more-than-human world, before moving on to a collaborative close reading of one of the two poems selected for the seminar. In the course of this collaborative reading, they were asked to read the poem aloud several times and then perform a line-by-line, stanza-by-stanza, close reading. Such a close-reading strategy was something students were familiar with, and they were provided with prompt questions to help guide this process. These prompts asked them to reflect on formal and stylistic features of the poem such as the composition of stanzas, rhyme, sounds, and the use of figurative language.

The worksheet also included reflective questions on the place-based approach. These questions included:

- How did you experience the process of reading, discussing and collectively interpreting a poem in the context of the Botanical Garden?
- How might this process have differed in a conventional classroom setting?
- What insights will you take away from having completed this activity?

These reflective questions at the end were intentionally designed with this group in mind; as future teachers themselves, the prompts were designed to not only deepen their understanding of the content, but also to help them think about how similar reflections might play out in their own future teaching scenarios. In this first iteration of the excursion, there was no follow-up classroom session, but students were invited to contribute to a discussion board on the activity, and were given the option to further delve into their experiences and analysis of Plath in the final take-home exam which formed the basis of the assessment for the module.

One of the question options in this aforementioned take-home exam (which students had one-week to complete), asked students do the following:

Discuss how completing one of Kleppe's activities before our excursion to the Botanical Garden impacted your understanding of either Plath's "Wintering" or "Stings." Alternatively, discuss how reading and discussing one of these Plath poems collaboratively in the Botanical Garden influenced your analysis. In your response, integrate close reading of the chosen poem and include textual evidence to support your claims.

We were initially concerned that directing students to their own experiences of the excursion and related activities might distract them from the literary criticism that is demanded from this question, and from the learning outcomes for the module in general. We found this fear to be unfounded, and in fact witnessed students engaging in deeper and more sustained analyses on the textual level despite, or perhaps because of, the demands to integrate the reflective component also. Students tended to remark on how the surroundings of the Botanical Garden helped foster a sense of closeness and a connection with the subject matter of the poems. Learning in a space where human-nature interactions are obvious helped students to think about their own relationship to nature (as caretakers, observers, participants, etc.). Furthermore, students tended to emphasise how taking the analysis of poems outside of the classroom allowed for freer group discussion, with the fresh air being mentioned as particularly conducive to the kind of non-literal interpretation required by poetry analysis.

4.2 Iteration 2: Glück

Louise Glück's Pulitzer Prize winning collection *The Wild Iris* (1992) consists of a series of poems in which "flowers 'speak' to the poet, at times describing their own situation (that is, what it is like to be a flower, to be in the ground, to be a bulb), and at other times responding to the poet-gardener's anxieties, and often critiquing the poet" (Morris, 2006, p. 7). "These articulate flora," as Burt (2016) asserts, facilitate Glück in representing "personalities very unlike one another" while also shedding light and casting shade on the poet's understanding of the self (Burt, p. 132).

In the Glück iteration of the Botanical Garden excursion, we this time allowed for a three-hour session in which students explored either "The Wild Iris" or "Lamium" (both from the collection *The Wild Iris*) to reflect on how Glück "[r]econfigure[s] the purview of the human" (Wyman, 2020, p. 149) in these texts which give voice to the plants themselves. As in the Plath iteration, students were asked to read both poems and complete a preparation assignment inspired by Kleppe. The options included going for a walk and taking photos of several celebrated plants (for example, garden flowers) and several ignored/overlooked plants (for example, groundcover plants or weeds), researching the titular plants in the poems either on the internet or by looking them up in physical books at a local library, or sketching, painting, or otherwise creating some sort of visual representation of one or both of these plants. At the beginning of the session, we convened in a classroom setting and students were provided with some of the theoretical basis for place-based approaches in the context of English education. They were then placed in small groups of three or four, and provided with a worksheet with a scaffolded set of activities for their time in the Botanical Garden.

The worksheet first asked students to find a suitable location in the Botanical Garden and then complete a warm-up task inviting them to pay close attention to their perceptual experience. Glück's poems pay attention to subtle ecological cues such as changes in light, and movement of air and soil, and to help students attune themselves to these kinds of cues they were asked to each list five sensory details (sound, scent, temperature, light, texture, etc.) and reflect on whether there were any echoes of these sensory details in either of the two poems. The next part of the worksheet asked them in their groups to perform a collaborative close reading of one of the two poems, reading it aloud several times, and then working through a series of analytically oriented questions concerning, for instance, form, structure, rhythm and sound.

The questions were designed to help students attend to some of the nuances in the poems which connected them with plants and place asking them to reflect on, for instance, how the poem's sounds interact with the surrounding soundscape, and the question of who is speaking (A plant? A self? A hybrid consciousness?). This analysis also asked students to reflect on ecological resonances in their chosen poem: What ecosystems are implied in the poem? What does the poem reveal about dependence on light, soil, human attention, neglect?

The second half of the worksheet activity shifted from a focus on reception, to a focus on creative production, asking students to find one plant in the garden that corresponded in some way with the plant in their chosen poem. They were then asked to observe this plant carefully looking at, for instance, physical structure, colour, shading, leaf shape, and where it grows. Following this, students were instructed to individually write a short poem about their chosen plant using the following instructions:

- a) Choose a perspective and decide who is speaking. Is it the plant itself? Is it a shifting consciousness (in the style of Glück)?
- b) Gather three sensory details:
 1. what does the plant **feel**, such as temperature, shade, wind?
 2. what can(not) it **see**, such as light levels, other plants, soil, sky?
 3. what does it **need**, such as attentions, stillness, etc.?
- c) Give your plant a mood (resentful, serene, hopeful, resigned, etc.)
- d) Write a 4-line poem (or longer if you wish) about your plant, beginning with one of the following lines:
 1. This is how you live when...
 2. From the dark soil...
 3. Where the roots ended...
 4. Under the surface...
 5. At the first hint of...

Following the time at the Botanical Garden, students then returned to the classroom for thirty minutes of reflective discussion focusing on how reading “The Wild Iris” or “Lamium” outside changed their interpretation compared to reading them indoors, and how encountering a real plant connected to one of the poems shifted their own interpretations of them. We also considered in what ways Glück’s poems encourage ecological thinking (for example, in terms

of interdependence, overlooked species, marginal voices, or transformation). At this stage, students were also invited to share their pre-seminar activities and/or creative poetry production. This was concluded with a brief reflection on how they, as future English teachers, saw the role of PBE in their own future classrooms and what opportunities or challenges they could foresee in integrating such an approach.

As per the Plath iteration, the take-home exam at the end of the module offered students the possibility to reflect more deeply on the excursion with the following question:

Choose one of Louise Glück's poems (either "The Wild Iris" or "Lamium") and discuss how reading and engaging with the poem through place-based activities (such as the pre-seminar task and/or the visit to the Botanical Garden) shaped your interpretation of the poem. In your answer, reflect on how sensory observation, attention to plants, or the outdoor reading context influenced your understanding of the poem's voice, imagery, or relationship between humans and the non-human world. Integrate close reading of the chosen poem and support your discussion with textual evidence.

As was the case with the exam question on Plath, we found that reflecting on place only enhanced the analytic qualities of the answers we received. Students pointed in particular to the increased capacity to recognise the "voice" and plight of the plants, and how these intersected with the human perspective or addressee. Another frequently mentioned upshot of reading the poems on the excursion was the ability to concretise visions of the plants being described and to connect them to the plants in the Garden, as well as to connect sensory descriptions to lived experiences. Students were better able to articulate some of the key themes and metaphors in the poems such as the cyclic nature of (plant) life ("The Wild Iris") and the existence of life on the margins or in the shade ("Lamium"). A not to be overlooked response also was that of an extra layer of enjoyment that the excursion brought to these poems.

5. Reflecting on place, poetry, and pedagogy

The two highly contextualised iterations of our Botanical Garden excursion are just examples of how we can model practices to future teachers of English in Sweden, enabling them to equip their own students with "the tools needed to, now and in the future" to be active agents of

change (Skolinspektionen, 2023, p. 1), by helping them develop vital close reading and analytical skills and connecting them with the environment that is in their own city. Due to the fact that “place-based education is by its nature specific to particular locales” (Smith, 2002) in this brief reflection on the activity, our aim is not to be prescriptive, but rather to explore some of the contextual elements which came into play in relation to this particular activity and to return to some of the theoretical concerns outlined in this paper to consider how they are enacted in practice.

In both the Plath and Glück iterations, relocating poetry to the Botanical Garden transformed the act of reading. We found that students tended to encounter the poems not as self-contained textual objects, but in the situational context in which they were reading. As we saw in the exam responses, meaning emerged through the interaction of the poem, the environment, and sensory input. This aligns neatly with Sobel (2004) on the use of the local environment as a springboard for learning.

Returning to Smith’s (2002) five features of place-based education is an apt way to see more clearly how theory and practice converge in our examples. In relation to Smith’s first feature foregrounding the local as “curricular foundation” (p. 593), we worked from the location outwards to develop our learning design. The space of the Botanical Garden, as well as the season, shaped our choices of poems. Both iterations took place in spring. For Plath this was important because it was a time when flowers were blooming and bees were industrious. And the choice of Glück’s two poems was grounded in foregrounding human-nature interaction which is so prominent in such a cultivated space. The worksheet and interpretative process too was very much guided by the specific locale. In terms of Smith’s second feature on foregrounding students as the creators of knowledge, the collaborative close readings and, in iteration 2, the creative production, saw students generate context-specific interpretations drawing on both techniques common to literary analysis whilst being attuned to observing ecology. This resonates with Didham (2022) on poetic learning as a dialogic and co-constructed process. On Smith’s third feature on the centrality of student questions, we designed our tasks as open-ended and non-prescriptive, encouraging instead students to explore and reflect. In line with developing the kind of sustainable competencies “to identify and clarify one’s own values” (Brundiers et al., 2021, p. 22), there was ample scope for students to bring in their own perspectives and embodied experiences. Linked closely is Smith’s fourth feature which situates the teacher as a guide and co-learner. In our excursions we wanted to facilitate close attention

and dialogue rather than looking for fixed interpretations. This maps neatly on to ESD frameworks that place emphasis on participation in student-centred approaches.

We as teachers saw our role in part as “brokers of community resources” (Smith, 2002, p. 593, facilitating the excursion and putting students in a more deliberate contact with the Garden. This leads neatly into the fifth and final feature from Smith (2002) which relates to the permeable nature of the classroom and the local community. We already know that forging intimate relationships with the environments in our own backyards is key to creating the conditions for action towards a sustainable future (Khadka et al., 2021; Howarth et al., 2024), and moving beyond the confines of the classroom and seeing a resource like the Botanical Garden as a learning space is one way to foster such relationships.

One of the most significant outcomes of the activities is the way in which poetry functions as a mode of “paying attention”. As Kleppe (2022) suggests, close reading practices are closely aligned with the necessary careful and non-invasive observation required for engagement with the non-human natural world. Our reflections on our activities support this claim with students repeatedly highlighting how the outdoor setting heightened their attentiveness to both the poem and their surroundings. In working with Glück’s speaking plants, or Plath’s bees, and reflecting on the roles of the poet-gardener and the poet-bee keeper respectively, students were invited to engage with non-human perspectives, life in the margins, and the interdependence of the human and natural world. Not only did the activity foster poetry analysis skills, but it attuned students to aspects such as marginalised and overlooked life (as in “*Lamium*” and its shaded existence), the close interaction and interdependence of the human and the non-human natural world, species vulnerability, and our role and responsibilities as human caretakers. These activities have, we believe, helped target the kinds of “values thinking” (Brundiers et al., 2021) that are inscribed in the Skolverket curriculum and the Higher Education Ordinance.

In this reflection, we also want to accentuate the importance of context, echoing Gruenewald and Smith (2014) on their assertion that place-based education is not something that can be standardised. On a very practical level, factors such as season, weather, time constraints, and student group dynamics all contributed to shaping the learning experience. Furthermore, the activities were all designed to fit with the learning aims for the literature course which focused primarily on developing literary analysis competencies and reflecting on pedagogical implications. We do not see these as limitations of the PBE approach, but rather note that

successful integration of such activities require teacher responsiveness to specific locales, the learning aims, and the group. Returning to the initial question that we ask about how EFL teacher education can contribute to sustainability, this study suggests that where and how we teach literature might play an important role in addition to the content knowledge that we teach.

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