

# Mental health in foreign language education

## Book of abstracts

**Mental health matters!** However, mental health can mean many different things as there are various types of, causes for, and ways of supporting as well as dealing with mental health issues. In foreign language education, there are numerous topics which can help to address issues of mental health and raise students' mental health awareness. These include, among others, trauma (resulting, for instance, from displacement, physical and mental abuse, bullying, or racism), mental or physical illnesses and disorders, and gender differences. In addition, some mental health issues are more specifically related to English language education - particularly, student and teacher well-being, student resilience, and stigma around mental health.

This symposium (Taboo Topics - Part II) and (6th) TEFL Day aims to explore mental health from various theoretical and practice-oriented perspectives. We welcome practising teachers, teacher trainers, lecturers, and researchers to attend this event.

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## Programme

### Day 1: 6. TEFL DAY & taboo symposium II (Friday, 26 November 2021)

09:30—09:45	<b>Opening welcome</b>
09:45—10:45	<b>Plenary 1:</b> Dr. Daniel Becker (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany): <i>Global, competent and healthy?: Dimensions of mental health education in ELT</i>
10:45—11:00	<b>Break</b>
11:00—12:00	<b>Workshop 1</b> (Christian Ludwig) / <b>2</b> (Theresa Summer)
12:00—13:30	<b>Talks 1 &amp; 2 &amp; 3</b> (30 min each) Peter Schildhauer Katrín Thomson Dominik Grubecki
13:30—14:30	<b>Lunch break</b> (or informal exchange in “wonder”)
14:30—15:30	<b>Workshop 1</b> (Christian Ludwig) / <b>2</b> (Theresa Summer)
15:30—15:45	<b>Break</b>
15:45—16:45	<b>Talks 4 &amp; 5</b> (30 min each) Grit Alter Carolin Zehne
16:45—18:00	<b>Plenary 2:</b> Prof. Dr. Michaela Sambanis (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany): <i>Down at the end of lonely street: Social isolation, loneliness, stress and boredom – A neuroDidactic view</i>

### Day 2: 6. TEFL DAY & taboo symposium II (Saturday, 27 November 2021)

10:00—11:00	<b>Plenary 3:</b> Prof. Dr. Sarah Mercer (Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria): <i>Teacher mental health matters: Understanding the ecology of teacher wellbeing</i>
11:00—12:30	<b>Parallel talks</b> (30 min each) a) Sebastian Beckmann b) Stamatia Savvani/Christina Gkonou a) Jelena Petrović/Eva Seidl b) Eleni Louloudi a) Christian Ludwig/Veronika Martinez b) Daniela Elsner
12:30—13:30	<b>Lunch break</b> (or informal exchange in “wonder”)
13:30—15:00	<b>Parallel talks</b> (30 min each) a) Magdalena Rozenberg b) Natasha Janzen Ulbricht/Lennart Naujoks a) Arnab Podder b) Marc Jones/Matthew Noble a) Roman Bartosch b) Maria Eisenmann
15:00—15:30	<b>Discussion, end of day, evaluation</b>

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### Grit Alter: The dis-ease of mental health in foreign language classrooms

Considering the common taboo topics that are part of the discourse (e.g., Linder/Majerus 2016), I believe mental health is the most controversial one; not necessarily as a topic itself, but as a topic to be addressed in language teaching. I aim to continue the fundamental discussion on whether taboo topics should be implemented in foreign language teaching. With a particular focus on mental health, I will zoom in on the terminology we use to address mental health, on conceptual considerations and particularly on current teacher education. An exemplary document analysis of current curricula and handbooks for teacher education unveils how they are prepared for tackling this complex issue.

### Roman Bartosch: Mental health and climate change literacy

Increasingly, climate change plays a role in psychological literature on mental health and well-being. This will challenge educational practice too. I will discuss how trauma and grief can be conceptualised in sustainability education and present an empirical project on climate-related mental health issues in future teachers. I conclude by showing how a better grasp of the diversity of emotional responses to climate change allows creative work in literature and culture pedagogy to unfold its potential as a specific and effective form of resilience and sustainability education.

### Daniel Becker: Global, competent...and healthy? Dimensions of mental health education in ELT

In recent years, mental health literacy has gained a prominent position in academic discourse (cf. Jorm 2020). Defined as the ability to recognise, manage and prevent mental health issues (ibid.), the concept can be described as the ultimate goal of mental health education, which aims at preparing children and teenagers for living a healthy life in a fast-paced global age. My presentation will explore mental health literacy in the context of English language education. It will analyse different dimensions of English language teaching in order to identify potential points of departure for incorporating mental health issues in the EFL classroom.

### Sebastian Beckmann: Promoting empathy in generation me – Psychological aspects of unreliable narration

Detecting unreliable narration is a social skill and a core competence of all social interaction and construction. This skill needs to be honed and studying unreliable narration should not be confined to university classrooms and lecture halls, it is essential that it is expanded into our schools. The study of literature has the potential to counteract the habit and current absurdity of limiting statements about reality to 280 characters, with no context and hardly any content. Novels which display unreliable narrators with mental deviations due to mental illnesses have great didactic potential: they train readers for life and promote empathy.

### Maria Eisenmann: Sally Nicholls' multimodal novel *Ways to Live Forever* in the EFL classroom

Sally Nicholls' multimodal novel *Ways to Live Forever* deals with the topic how to live with leukemia. It covers the last three months of Sam's life and functions as his diary. In the everyday descriptions, notes, question lists and wishful thinking of Sam and his best friend Felix, who suffers from cancer, think about life and death. This talk is about how *Ways to Live Forever* can be used in an EFL classroom. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed to find out pupils' motivation through multimodality and also students' attitude towards the difficult themes of the novel.

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## **Daniela Elsner: Overcoming academic procrastination by working with motto goals in the EFL classroom?**

Academic procrastination, understood as the voluntary delay of action on academic tasks, despite negative consequences, is a common problem amongst students. 50–80% students in college age procrastinate moderately or severely. Research, however, also shows that procrastinators have higher stress levels and more acute health problems than individuals who complete their tasks on time. Procrastination is linked to anxiety and depression, feelings of shame, guilt, negative stress and poor mental health (Sirois, 2014). In this talk I will elaborate on the results of formulating and working with motto-goals in the EFL Classroom at Secondary level to overcome procrastination and test anxiety.

## **Christina Gkonou & Stamatia Savvani: The impact of game-based teaching on language teachers' emotions**

In this presentation, we follow the emotions of 10 EFL teachers from Greece, whom we guided in designing and applying gameful activities in their online classes. Detailed analysis of teachers' emotions (from teacher interviews and class observations) is under way but preliminary insights show that teacher participants felt mostly positive emotions when engaged in creative practice and designing games. Even though some teachers felt some slight anxiety when preparing games that they had never tried before, or were concerned about technological affordances, their satisfaction and pride peaked when gameful materials were received most positively from students, engagement- and learning-wise.

## **Dominik Grubecki: Mental health awareness of queer people in the EFL classroom**

According to numerous international studies, queer people are at particular risk of suffering from mental health conditions. As students move on to the crucial phase of discovering their sexual and gender identity in adolescence, school education seems to offer a point of departure for the promotion of good mental health of queer people for all students. With a focus on the EFL classroom at the secondary school level, this contribution aims at building a bridge between theory and practice. It should not only provide specific guidelines for practitioners and teacher-trainees, but moreover offer useful teaching impulses.

## **Natasha Janzen Ulbricht & Lennart Naujoks: Language in movement – How gestures reduce stress and increase learning**

You just knew what you wanted to say. The words were on the tip of your tongue, but as soon as it is your turn, they become twisted and your ability to speak is gone... Stress isn't just bothersome, data suggest that stress is one of the most important risk factors for mental health. In this workshop we present gesture-supported communication as a teaching method which reduces stress. Participants experience how games and instruction can use gestures to introduce and practice new vocabulary and what it feels like as a teacher to talk with your hands.

## **Marc Jones & Matthew Noble: "What about teachers?": A duoethnographic exploration of ADHD in ELT**

The psychology of language teachers is a burgeoning field but risks promoting a tacit assumption that teachers are neurotypical, with any neurodivergent tendencies assumed to be both negative and temporary. As teachers with ADHD, this does not reflect our personal experiences. For us and many more teachers, ADHD shapes our behavior as well as our personal identities and teacher identities. We will use duoethnography to examine our personal and professional beliefs, histories, and the effects of ADHD on our classroom practices and careers. We will explore critical incidents, compare personal narratives, and invite participants to reflect upon issues raised.

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## Eleni Louloudi: "But, are you really fine?": Reconstructing mental health education – A critical digital literacy lesson proposed by ELT student teachers

Mental health, as one of the most crucial and intertemporally relevant social justice topics, has oftentimes been neglected in school (and teacher) education, because of its controversial character and the fear of it becoming "too difficult" for both teachers and students. This presentation will look into ways ELT student teachers have worked towards deconstructing the fear of mental health matters in language teaching and, furthermore, reconstructing new ways of dealing with the topic in the classroom using a critical literacy framework. Additionally, it will focus on the different uses of a variety of digital tools -method- and content-based- in addressing issues of mental health and shaping a democratic identity in the classroom from the eyes of perspective teachers.

## Christian Ludwig & Veronika Martinez: *Lighter Than My Shadow*. Graphic memoirs about mental health in the multimodal EFL classroom

Eating disorders remain a taboo(ed) issue in society. Katie Green's 2017 graphic novel memoir *Lighter Than My Shadow* depicts the journey of an anorexic teenager, illustrating the unseen faces of eating disorders. Graphic memoirs seem particularly apt for discussing critical issues, especially in educational contexts, as authors can not only write about personal stories and events but also show them. Against this background, this talk explores how to openly talk about taboo illnesses with advanced learners of English as a foreign language.

## Sarah Mercer: Teacher mental health matters: Understanding the ecology of teacher wellbeing

Given the importance of teacher wellbeing for professional practice, it is surprising that language teacher wellbeing does not feature more prominently in research and practice in the field. In this talk, I will stress the importance of language teacher wellbeing, reflect on definitional concerns, and use an ecological perspective to report on a series of empirical studies as well as set out suggestions for practice and an agenda for future research.

## Jelena Petrović & Eva Seidl: Lust oder Frust? Psychische Gesundheit im Kontext hochschulischer Sprachlehre

Dieser Beitrag berichtet über ein hochschulübergreifendes Kooperationsprojekt zur psychischen Gesundheit von Studierenden an zwei verschiedenen österreichischen Hochschultypen. Aufbauend auf Erkenntnissen zu gesundheitsförderlichen Ressourcen im Studium (Niemeyer 2020) und zur Bedeutung von Positiver Psychologie in der Sprachlehre (Mercer et al. 2018; Seidl 2021) werden unterschiedliche Ansätze hochschulischer Sprachlehre fokussiert. Dazu wurden im Sommersemester 2021 Sensibilisierungsaktivitäten zu psychischer Gesundheit, Lebenszufriedenheit, Wohlbefinden und Resilienzfaktoren mit Studierenden durchgeführt und evaluiert. Zusätzlich zur Förderung der Gesundheitskompetenz der Studierenden war ein Projektziel, Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen den Hochschultypen zu erheben, was psychische Gesundheit und Sprachunterricht betrifft, also ob deren Besuch Lust oder Frust bedeutet.

## Arnab Podder: "My lesson was a disaster": A study exploring anxiety among trainee teachers of English

Teachers worldwide often experience feelings of anxiety on initial teacher education courses. This is critical as anxiety of any form can not only impede performance but can also lead to mental distress. My talk will aim to better understand why trainees are confronted with anxieties and what measures could be adopted to support them throughout their learning journey. For this purpose, I will refer to classroom observations and follow-up interviews conducted with five CELTA trainees from India. My findings indicate that most anxiety-inducing factors emanate from the essential practical component of such courses, especially lesson observations and post-observation feedback.

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## Magdalena Rozenberg: Selbstmanagement: Psyche und Soma verbinden - Altes Problem und moderne Fremdsprachenlehrerbildung

Das Problem, dem dieser Beitrag nachgehen will, ist mit den derzeit im Bildungswesen vorherrschenden Kategorien wie Standards/Standardisierung, Parametrisierung verbunden, die in operativer Hinsicht den Lehrerberuf messtheoretisch quantifizierend bestimmen (vgl. Ruhloff 2007). Infolge bestehender Metrisierung pädagogisch-didaktischen Handelns und dadurch ständig wachsender Anforderungen leiden Lehrkräfte unter körperlichem Druck und seelischen Belastungen. Deshalb entwickelt sich die Notwendigkeit, der Quantifizierung von Lehren und Bildung die Dimension des Menschlichen entgegenzusetzen. Daher wird auf Selbstmanagement fokussiert, das auf das Kohärenzpotenzial von Psyche und Soma für die Konstituierung des Selbst hinweist. So berührt Selbstmanagement-Ansatz ein altes Psyche-Soma-Problem, das in der modernen (Fremdsprachen-)Lehrerbildung immer wieder ignoriert wird.

## Michaela Sambanis: "Down at the end of lonely street": Social isolation, loneliness, stress and boredom – A neuroDidactic view

2020/2021 have been marked by unexpected and substantial changes, impacting our ways of teaching and learning. The avoidance of social contact in order to stay safe (at least physically safe) led to isolation, oftentimes triggering negative emotions like loneliness or apathetic boredom. The talk refers to research on isolation, loneliness, stress and boredom as risk factors as well as to recent studies from neuroscience on brain-to-brain synchrony in the classroom, elaborating on its didactic relevance.

## Peter Schildhauer: (Mental) Challenges of a post-truth society: Investigating conspiracy theories

The spread of conspiracy theories (CTs) has been boosted recently – e.g. by the availability of social media. Therefore, today's students are likely to encounter CTs in their everyday lives. This talk focuses on the mental health implications of CTs: They are seductive as they answer psychological needs. Because they offer a narrative different from the mainstream, dealing with CTs entails asking which construction of reality is 'true'. This may have implications for adolescent identity. Based on CT material and interviews with ELT practitioners, this talk suggests ideas for turning CTs from a taboo into a topic for the ELT classroom.

## Katrin Thomson: The discourse of care in ELT: Teacher talk and student well-being

What teachers say and how they say it can affect students in various ways. Thus, as both classroom and language authorities EFL teachers have particularly great social-emotional, ethical and moral responsibilities towards their students. Taking on these responsibilities on the micro-level of classroom discourse and teacher talk is essentially the core concern of 'teacher caring' and the 'discourse of care'. In this talk, I will address the following questions: How can the 'care dimension' in ELT be conceptualized? How does 'care' materialize in L2 teacher talk and teacher actions? What discursal techniques can EFL teachers use to contribute to student well-being?

## Carolin Zehne: Mental health and video games – Using *Hellblade* in the TEFL classroom

Video games have become an important aspect of youth culture and thus of students' everyday lives outside of the classroom. While stereotypical depictions of mental illness have been perpetuated in numerous commercial video games, the medium has started to use its potential to display mental health issues in more realistic ways. Taking *Hellblade- Senua's Sacrifice* and its portrayal of an embodied experience of mental illness as an example, I would like to outline how video games can be used in the TEFL classroom to tackle such stereotypes and potentially foster student empathy.

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## Workshops

### **Christian Ludwig: (Un)ashamed (visual) conversations - Talking about mental health in ELT**

Mental health issues, including, for example, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and eating disorders, often emerge during adolescence. However, discussions about mental (and physical) health still remain taboo (ed) issues in educational contexts. The aim of this workshop is to explore how we can openly talk about mental health in the English as a foreign language classroom, particularly focusing on literary texts and graphic novels.

### **Theresa Summer: Promoting student well-being through songs**

Music can provide support, reduce anxiety, and contribute to our well-being. In foreign language education, songs can support learners in two main ways: First, integrating songs into English lessons can help create a pleasant and relaxed learning atmosphere. Second, as mental health is a major theme in pop culture artefacts, songs can be used to explore mental health issues. Given the great pedagogic potential of pop songs, this workshop explores how student well-being can be promoted in English language education through a variety of song-based activities.

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## Bios

**Grit Alter** is Professor of Foreign Language Teaching at the University College of Teacher Education Tyrol, Austria. Her research interests include forms of cultural learning and global education, using children's and young adult literature in ELT, critical coursebook analysis, critical pedagogy and literacies, and curriculum studies.

**Roman Bartosch** (PhD) is Associate Professor at the University of Cologne and works on ELT and Anglophone literatures and cultures. His latest book, *Cultivating Sustainability in Literature and Culture Pedagogy*, is forthcoming with Routledge in 2021. He currently works on literacy and the notion of resilience in literary and political education.

**Daniel Becker** (PhD) works as a senior TEFL-lecturer and Post-Doc researcher at the University of Münster. His research interests include teaching literature and culture, inter/transcultural learning, multiliteracies, mental health and taboos, game-based learning and digital media.

**Sebastian Beckmann** has been working as a teacher, trainee instructor, and assistant principal at high schools in Germany and the US. He completed his PhD with Prof. Vera Nünning at Heidelberg University and received a scholarship from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. He is the author of several writing and language training programs.

**Maria Eisenmann** is Professor and Chair of EFL Teaching at the Julius-Maximilians-University Würzburg. Her primary research interests lie in the fields of digital literacy, literary learning, and global education including individual differences. She has published widely in the fields of foreign language education, digital and literary literacy in the EFL classroom.

**Daniela Elsner** is Professor and Chair of TEFL Pedagogy at the Goethe-University Frankfurt/ Main, where she is also Director of the Academy of Teacher Education and Research. Daniela holds a license in psychotherapie (HPP) and systemic coaching, and she offers coaching in her own coaching practice [www.coaching-mit-care.de](http://www.coaching-mit-care.de)

**Christina Gkonou** is Associate Professor of TESOL and MA TESOL Programme Leader in the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex. Her research interests are in language learner and teacher emotions as well as teacher professional development and education.

**Dominik Grubecki** is a student assistant at the Department of English Didactics at the Freie Universität Berlin. He is currently completing his master's degree to become a teacher. He is responsible for the overall coordination of the neuroDidactX – Talking Future Education 2021 conference.

**Natasha Janzen Ulbricht** holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT from St. Mary's Twickenham, London. She has trained teachers and taught EFL in Germany, Zambia and the United States. Her research interests include gesture and teaching in difficult circumstances. She is completing doctoral studies at the Freie Universität Berlin.



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**Marc Jones** is a lecturer at Toyo University. He published a practitioner-oriented article on ADHD in 2019. He was diagnosed with ADHD in 2017.

**Eleni Louloudi** (M.A.) is a research fellow (Bielefeld University) and a PhD candidate (University of Cologne). Her research interests include comparative social justice education, critical, socio-cultural and digital literacies, children's literature as a medium of inclusion and innovative ethnographic methodologies.

**Christian Ludwig** (PhD) is currently Visiting Professor of Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. His research interests include teaching literature, graphic novels, and moving images.

**Veronika Martinez** has been working as a Physical Education and English teacher at a vocational school in Aalen since 2011. In her degree thesis she focused on body images of adolescents in relation to the media. Her research interests focus on comics and graphic novels.

**Sarah Mercer** is Professor of Foreign Language Teaching at the University of Graz, Austria, where she is Head of ELT methodology. Her research interests include all aspects of the psychology surrounding the foreign language learning experience. She is the author, co-author and co-editor of several books in this area. She has been Principal Investigator on various funded research projects. She works on the editorial board of various journals and is currently vice-president of the International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning (IAPLL). In 2018, she was awarded the Robert C Gardner Award for excellence in second language research by the International Association of Language and Social Psychology (IALSP).

**Lennart Naujoks** graduated from the University of Hamburg with a Master's degree in History and German Studies. Since his 2nd state examination, he has worked as a teacher at an elementary school in Berlin. Currently, he is doing PhD work on second language acquisition and gesture research at Humboldt University.

**Matthew Noble** teaches at RMUTT in Thailand. His interests include reflective practice and novice teacher learning. He was diagnosed with ADHD at 16.

**Jelena Petrović** unterrichtet DaF/DaZ, B/K/S und Russisch: an der Fachhochschule Joanneum und der Caritas Akademie Graz. Sie studierte Konferenzdolmetschen (Russisch und B/K/S) an der Universität Graz, absolvierte den Lehrgang "Deutsch als Zweitsprache" der Caritas Akademie Graz und arbeitete an der Pädagogischen Hochschule in Woronesch und am Österreich Institut in Belgrad.

**Arnab Podder** is a corporate trainer and teacher of English with the British Council in India. He holds a Master's Degree in TESOL from King's College London. His research interests include teacher education, psychology of learning and teaching, and teacher well-being.

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**Magdalena Rozenberg** (Dr. phil.) studierte Germanistik an der Universität Gdańsk. 2004 wurde sie im Fach Deutsch als Fremdsprache an der Universität Bielefeld promoviert. Seit 2007 ist sie Assistant Professor am Institut für Germanistik der Universität Gdańsk tätig. Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte sind Selbstmanagement, Außerschulische Lernorte, Forschendes Lernen, Beziehungen zwischen Fremdsprachendidaktik und Kunst.

**Michaela Sambanis** is Professor and Chair of English Didactics in the Institute for English Language and Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin. In her work, she combines evidence from didactics, neuroscience and psychology and encourages the dialogue between researchers and practitioners.

**Stamatia Savvani** holds a BA in Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology and an MA in TESOL. She has been teaching English to young learners and adults since 2015. She is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex and researches language teachers' emotions and gameful teaching practices.

**Peter Schildhauer** (PhD) is a researcher (Akademischer Rat) at the TEFL department at Bielefeld University. Since he finished his PhD thesis on the linguistic history of personal blogging, he has been interested in the implications social media have on English language teaching.

**Eva Seidl** unterrichtet Deutsch als Fremd- und Erst- bzw. Bildungssprache: am Institut für Theoretische und Angewandte Translationswissenschaft sowie am Zentrum für Sprache, Plurilingualismus und Fachdidaktik (treffpunkt sprachen) der Universität Graz, wo sie auch als Sprachlernbegleiterin im Studierendencoaching tätig ist. In Graz studierte sie Germanistik (inkl. DaF) und Romanistik (Italienisch).

**Theresa Summer** is Associate Professor of English language education at the University of Bamberg. Her main research interests include pop culture, critical language pedagogy and taboos, ecopedagogy, and the development of grammatical competence. She is a fully trained secondary school teacher and co-editor of the journal *Englisch 5-10* (Friedrich Verlag, Hannover).

**Katrin Thomson** (Dr. phil.) is post-doc TEFL researcher (Akademische Rätin) at the University of Augsburg (2017-) and recently held a position as Interim Professor of TEFL at the University of Regensburg (3/2020-9/2021). Her current research projects focus on pre-service EFL teacher education with specializations in teachers' classroom discourse competence and ELT-specific approaches to classroom management. Her most recent publications include articles on classroom discourse (2020) and teacher talk (2020). She is also editor of *Classroom Discourse Competence: Current Issues in Language Teaching and Teacher Education* (forthcoming, Narr 2021).

**Carolyn Zehne** (M.Ed.) is a lecturer (Lehrkraft für besondere Aufgaben) at the TEFL department at Bielefeld University. Her research interests include implications of Global Englishes/English as a lingua franca as well as the potential of digital media for (inclusive) ELT.