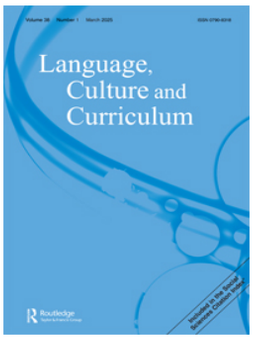

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Michael Byram, Melina Porto & Manuela Wagner

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NOTE

Ethical issues in foreign/world language teaching – the example of teaching for intercultural citizenship

Michael Byram [a], Melina Porto [b] and Manuela Wagner [c]

[a]Department of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria; [b]Instituto de Investigaciones en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales (Institute of Research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities), Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación (School of Humanities and Sciences of Education), Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET (National Research Council), La Plata, Argentina; [c]Department of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages, University of Connecticut, Storrs, USA

ABSTRACT

In this article, we discuss some ethical issues arising from teaching foreign or world languages for intercultural citizenship. From this perspective, language education engages students in critical investigations of social issues and in the application of linguistic, communicative and intercultural skills beyond the classroom to address such issues in the society. After introducing intercultural citizenship, we illustrate some ethical issues for teachers raised by such teaching with a project carried out in Higher Education in Argentina and the United Kingdom. We argue that an ethically justified position takes into account the pedagogical strategies in teaching for intercultural citizenship which may expose learners to risk and, secondly, consider whether it should also include teaching new values as found in other societies. We conclude that the second is not necessary and that it is more important to encourage a critical mindset in learners, which is directed towards their own values as well as new ones they might encounter.

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Introduction

Having reported on our empirical projects on intercultural citizenship on several occasions (Byram et al., 2020; Porto et al., 2023; Porto & Byram, 2015), in this article we turn to ethical issues in teaching languages for intercultural citizenship and reflect on the implications for teachers, whether for example they should expect or even require learners to engage in social action, whether they should avoid exposing learners to any risk whatsoever To illustrate aspects of our argument we refer to one example of teaching for intercultural citizenship, but do not repeat an account of this or other projects in detail for lack of space and because they have been for some time in the public domain.

The question of what is ethically appropriate in teachers' roles and behaviours is not new in education as is evident from the journal *Ethics and Education* and others (e.g. Campbell, 2008; Higgins, 2010), and values education is well-established in pedagogical research (Arthur & Lovat, 2013; Lovat et al., 2010; Tomlinson & Quinton, 1986). When teaching extends beyond imparting knowledge to involve solving real-world problems and fostering

CONTACT Manuela Wagner manuela.wagner@uconn.edu

critical thinking, the ethical complexities increase. This shift demands careful consideration of how students are guided in critically thinking about the complexities of real-life tasks. As Noddings and Brooks (2016) point out, 'Critical thinking appears as a primary aim of education over most of the world today' (p. 1). Often the teaching of critical thinking is linked with teaching controversial issues which in turn brings up ethical issues related to a number of aspects and also dependent of the various contexts (e.g. Noddings & Brooks, 2016; Chikoko et al., 2018, Kubota, 2016). On the other hand, foreign/world language teaching in schools and universities has only begun to face this question after widening its purposes in policies and practices to include not only knowledge and skills development related to aspects of language *per se* but also an increased acknowledgement of and focus on 'humanistic' purposes in policy documents and curriculum guidelines.

The examples of policy presented below chosen from contrasting countries and continents must serve to show that this development is widespread. In China, as part of a general approach (Qin, 2022), the College English curriculum – i.e. the English that all students must learn in Chinese universities – refers to the usual 'instrumental' reasons for learning English: it will be useful for students of any subject to be able to use English in their profession and career. However, this is coupled with 'humanistic quality education':

> College English curriculum is not only a basic language course, but also a quality-oriented education course to broaden knowledge and understand world culture, *both instrumental and humanistic* (…) The integration of *humanistic quality education* into college English teaching can *cultivate students' sense of social responsibility* through subtle influence. (Li, 2020, p. 117 – emphasis added)

In Australia, in the context of teaching humanities and social sciences, Gilbert (2016) explains:

> In the past, scholars have been ambivalent about teaching values, largely because the role of values in the curriculum was seldom clearly stated. Recently, the situation has changed considerably, as a number of policy and curriculum statements and materials development projects have been more explicit about the place of values in the curriculum. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for young Australians (Barr et al., 2008, pp. 4, 5, 9) states that 'a school's legacy to young people should include *national values of democracy, equity and justice*, and personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, and respect for others'. (p.127 – emphasis added)

This formulation of 'national values' with the explicit reference to equity and justice aligns with the Chinese document's emphasis on 'social responsibility', and this in turn links with the next example, from Norway, where there is a similar vocabulary to that used in China: the use of 'education' and 'humanistic':

> Foreign languages are both an *educational subject and a humanistic subject* (…) Competences in language and culture shall give the individual the possibility to understand, to 'live into' and value other cultures' social life and life at work, their modes and conditions of living, their way of thinking, their history, art and literature.
>
> The area of study (languages) can also contribute to developing interest and tolerance, *develop insight in one's own conditions of life and own identity*, and contribute to a joy in reading, creativity, experience and personal development.

(The Norwegian Directorate of Education, n.d., Curriculum in foreign languages section – emphasis added)

The Norwegian curriculum goes on to a different but similar point about 'social responsibility', linking language teaching to education for democratic citizenship and to an international perspective 'beyond country borders':

> Good competence in languages will also lay the ground for participation in activities which *build democracy beyond country borders* and differences in culture.
>
> (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, n.d., Curriculum in foreign languages section – emphasis added)

The implication in this statement is that, usually, democratic participation is thought of in terms of being a member of the community of one's own country. The Norwegian document invites us to think of (democratic) communities beyond the limitations of the borders of a country.

Such explicit reference to 'democracy beyond borders' might not be found in documents from other countries and continents and needs to be understood in the context of attitudes to democracy in Europe, the Americas, and beyond (e.g. Organisation of American States, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). In Europe, the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) (2018) offers guidelines for language teaching practice and policy statements and provides a means of planning the teaching of intercultural and democratic competences in all subjects and in educational institutions. Language teaching is an important part of this since the RFCDC includes communicative and intercultural competences, and we shall return to this below.

Irrespective of any reference to democracy, the addition of words such as 'social responsibility' and 'participation' takes language teaching beyond an earlier emphasis on 'communication' – often understood as simply exchanging information – which deals scarcely, if at all, with such concepts and raises correspondingly few ethical dilemmas.[1] However, when such 'communicative language teaching' adds to its communication skills aims the further purpose that learners should acquire understanding of other cultures and people and a potential change in their attitudes towards them, teachers take a pedagogical responsibility to change their learners. This does not however go beyond the responsibility of many other teachers in subjects such as history, geography or even the natural sciences. It is when language teachers take seriously the notion that they should develop their learners' sense of social responsibility not only in their own society but beyond, that the complications arise and analysis is needed, and this is the purpose of this article.

In our work we have introduced the concept of 'intercultural citizenship' (Byram, 2008) as a development of language teaching. It differs from the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2015) which has a focus on identification with a world community, or world citizenship (Nussbaum, 1997) or global citizenship which is used, for example, by the United Nations and other organisations. Intercultural citizenship is a set of competences which learners can use to address problems in their own and an international community. In doing so they may acquire a new sense of identification with others. In an intercultural citizenship approach learners typically communicate in real time (perhaps online) with other language learners and, together with them, critically analyse a social issue – including the option to focus on issues of social (in)justice – and decide on some action they will take in their (local) community, which they now see as part of a transnational community, to address an identified problem. Our aim

here is to describe this approach and to analyse and discuss some of the ethical issues for language teachers which it raises. In so doing, we will not only discuss the ethical problems teachers face but also demonstrate that language teachers and their learners can make a significant contribution in the contemporary internationalised world.

Example of intercultural citizenship in practice

To briefly illustrate intercultural citizenship in practice, here is a vignette from Higher Education (Yulita & Porto, 2017).

> Taking their work on a highly sensitive issue outside the classroom to inform and engage different sections of the public, a group of students are talking to people in the streets of a city in Argentina about what they have been doing in their English lessons. They show them leaflets that they and students in a British university have produced about the World Cup held in Argentina in 1978 during the rule of a military dictatorship, during which many people were 'disappeared' because they opposed the regime. Other groups share their leaflets on social media with students of other disciplines at their university, give an awareness-raising talk at the School of Medicine, participate in alive radio programme at the university, or prepare teaching materials on the topic for a primary school class. The students are aged 18–21 and enrolled in an English course, and for them the World Cup is 'history'.
>
> In a questionnaire at the beginning of the course when asked about their expectations they responded that they wanted to 'master' the language, gain accuracy in writing, reduce or eliminate grammar errors, and be corrected by the teacher. Their teacher had a different understanding of what language education entails and together with a Spanish teacher at a British university planned the project which was guided by three main principles: languages are best learned when they are used with a genuine purpose; the content has to be engaging and socially relevant; the university should connect student learning with community action beyond the university itself.
>
> The first stage of the project aimed at stimulating students' curiosity. Students researched the theme, in the classroom and independently at home. In class, they watched the film 'El mundial 78 – La historia paralela' [The world cup 78-The parallel story], heard the songs 'Mothers of the Disappeared' by U2 and 'They dance alone' by Sting, and became familiar with the official music of the cup ('Marcha oficial del Mundial 78'). They then searched independently for additional materials (e.g. newspapers, videos, films, documentaries, songs, photographs, book and magazine covers) in Spanish and English. In reflection logs, the Argentinian students said they were surprised by the topic and admitted knowing very little, even though it had been part of history lessons in school. The British students knew almost nothing. Guided by teachers' questions targeted at the critical thinking skills described above, the students independently in each country critically analysed the materials, discussed ideas in class, compared and contrasted the sociopolitical circumstances of the 1978 World Cup with other sporting events that had taken place under similar circumstances, and designed bilingual posters to summarise the information and present their position to the other group.
>
> Next, both groups communicated with each other about what they had found, using a wiki in asynchronous communication. They gained knowledge about the dictatorship period, identifying covert messages and the manipulation in the media dealing with human rights abuses by the military junta throughout the masquerade of the world cup (killings, torture, disappearances, abduction of new-born babies under the regime).
>
> In the next, intercultural dialogue phase, students met online in real time in mixed nationality small groups. Following specific guidelines provided by the teachers, they mainly talked about the theme and shared similarities and differences in their views. The purpose was to

> create a bilingual multimodal leaflet, poster or video to raise awareness about human rights violations during the dictatorship in the Argentinian society but also beyond. These were the materials some of them talked about to people in the streets.
>
> Finally, the Argentinian students engaged with the community. Without teacher intervention at this stage, they planned and implemented civic or social actions in their local, regional and/or global communities some of which we saw above. For example, in addition to the activities already mentioned, they interviewed family members, friends or neighbours; some visited the museum *Casa Mariani – Teruggi*, a house from which a whole family had been abducted to disappear forever and interviewed the museum guides. The students found this stage highly engaging and expressed pride, happiness and satisfaction in their community-oriented work.

The vignette shows that introducing intercultural citizenship into language teaching creates (temporary) transnational socio-cultural groups. In this process, students develop new alliances and identifications, different from their national identifications, through decentring, becoming aware of the national basis of their views and new ways of seeing the world, and a shared desire to take action to build peaceful, just, and sustainable societies. This is what we consider to be 'internationalist thinking' based on the theory and practice of internationalism (Byram, 2018; Byram et al., 2023), first defined for educational policymaking by Elvin:

> What I mean by internationalism is a readiness to act on the assumption that mankind as a whole is the proper society to have in mind for matters that cannot with safety or with such good effect be left exclusively within the domain of smaller social groups such as nations. (1960, p. 16)

In bringing together learners of different cultural groups – whether in one country or across country borders – intercultural citizenship education helps them to address matters too big for one group, 'too big' for nations. It provides 'an Archimedean point from which to view the world, and their [learners'] own nation and country within it, a point from which they can see what they have never seen before' (Byram, 2018). Language education directs learners' attention to otherness (linguistic, cultural), plays a significant role in the development of internationalist perspectives, and provides a moral direction that emphasises a common humanity, mutual responsibility, criticality, and civic engagement.

In the dictatorship project, this internationalist approach in thinking and acting was first and foremost manifested in the learning aims the teachers had for the project:

THINKING

- explore, analyse, reflect on, and discuss human rights violations covered up through sporting events locally and globally;
- challenge taken-for-granted media representations of the Argentinian dictatorship and other human rights violations in specific contexts associated with international sporting events.

ACTING

- devise an action plan intended to raise awareness in society about human rights violations disguised under the cover of international sporting events.

The teaching sequence was also devised to foster internationalist perspectives as the students were encouraged to critically analyse, reflect upon, and state their position about the manipulation of the media in their selected sporting events from both the Argentinean and British perspectives. They did so by creating leaflets and brochures which compared the 1978 World Cup with the 1934 World Cup in Italy, the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium Disaster in the UK, the 2008 Olympic in Beijing, the 2012 Olympics in London, and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

The project was founded on the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN Human Rights Council, 2011) and the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) (2018). The RFCDC in particular is a document that offers guidelines for language teaching practice and policy statements and provides a means of planning the teaching of intercultural and democratic competences in all subjects and in educational institutions. Language teaching is an important part of this since the RFCDC includes communication, intercultural, and values competences. For instance, an analysis of the leaflets produced by the students (Yulita, 2017) shows that during project implementation the students discovered photographs of the dictatorship censored by the media in Argentina and identified that censorship as one of the 'contemporary threats to democracy' (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 52). Foregrounding the value of freedom of expression, during a Skype conversation with her British peers, one Argentinian student said: 'Está bueno ver que en otros países se mostraba la realidad, lo que estaba pasando acá, y que acá en nuestro país, eso no se podía ver. ['It is good to see that other countries were showing the reality, what was happening here, and what here in our country we could not see.']. In another example, in their analysis of the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster, the students developed competences defined in the RFCDC model such as 'knowledge and critical understanding of history' and the 'value of justice' (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 54). They reflected upon police errors and concluded that 'Margaret Thatcher's government hid crucial documents to blame Liverpool hooligans' and to make people believe 'they were responsible for the tragedy' (from Skype conversation). The students also developed what the RFCDC defines as 'civic-mindedness' as they 'placed the disappearances, tortures and killings in Argentina in a global context and held the world accountable for these crimes against humanity. These students highlighted that the world, despite knowing, kept passive' (Yulita, 2017, p. 509)

Principles of intercultural citizenship within foreign/world language education

The teachers involved in this project do not see intercultural citizenship as the only purpose of foreign/world language teaching for intercultural citizenship; they also emphasise the usual competences and aims. However, when intercultural citizenship is the focus, there are three pillars: the internationalist thinking discussed above, criticality, and community engagement which need to be considered in the context of the teaching of values.

Criticality

> 'Criticality' as we understand it here emphasises discovery, curiosity about and critique of cultural behaviours and worldviews in social groups who speak another language – whether in

another country or learners' own – and comparative critique with learners' own groups and their behaviours and worldviews.

It includes a focus on attitudes to and judgements about values and beliefs that other people might hold and, by comparison, judgements about the values and beliefs learners acquire from their own linguistic and cultural environment. Language education includes critical analysis and reflection about 'them' but also about 'us'.

Critical thinking skills are those that are required to evaluate and make judgements about materials of any kind (Nussbaum, 2010) and this has been specified in the RFCDC:

1. Making evaluations on the basis of internal consistency, and on the basis of consistency with available evidence and experience.
2. Making judgments about whether or not materials under analysis are valid, accurate, acceptable, reliable, appropriate, useful and/or persuasive.
3. Understanding and evaluating the preconceptions, assumptions and textual or communicative conventions upon which materials are based.
4. Recognising one's own assumptions and preconceptions that might have biased the evaluative process, and acknowledging that one's beliefs and judgments are always contingent and dependent upon one's own cultural affiliations and perspective

(adapted from Council of Europe, 2018, Vol 1, p. 47).

We also draw upon Barnett's (1997) developmental model of criticality, which delineates three criticality domains (propositions, ideas, and theories; the internal world; and the external world) and four ascending levels (from level one's critical skills of learning to be critical; reflexivity, where skills are applied to acquired knowledge; refashioning traditions through criticality – refashioning of traditions; and at level 4, transformatory critique that involves transforming the world) (Barnett, 1997, p. 103). This means that criticality, in this context, surpasses mere skills development. Instead, it involves applying acquired skills to knowledge and utilising them to effect change. In that sense, students further develop their criticality and decide themselves which actions they want to take to address societal problems they deem important.

Community engagement

Intercultural citizenship engages students in the critical investigation of the status quo, in other words, of significant social issues with impact not only locally in their own contexts but beyond. In this way, students become 'citizens of the greater community'. The active challenging of the status quo adds a social justice basis to language teaching (e.g. Osborn, 2006) and this foundation becomes a 'philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity' (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 46). Teachers facilitate students' development of their linguistic and intercultural skills and also help them apply those skills in working towards the solution of a relevant problem through some sort of action in the community. This action-oriented approach to language teaching is promoted by Picardo and North (2019) but our approach encourages students to take action in their local and international communities on matters they had addressed from an intercultural and internationalist perspective in the classroom.

Teaching values in intercultural citizenship

Intercultural citizenship was developed in the context of teaching languages in democratic states in Europe, the Americas, and beyond (Organisation of American States, 2011; UNESCO, 2015), but it espouses no specific set of values. The crucial point is that it encourages learners to critically analyse values under the notion of 'critical cultural awareness', that is, an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

In contrast, the RFCDC model of competences includes a list of European values, as promoted by the Council of Europe:

–Valuing human dignity and human rights.
–Valuing cultural diversity.
–Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

On the other hand, there is no claim that these values are exclusively European and there is much overlap with values statements in other parts of the world. What is important therefore is not *which* values should be taught but, in addition to a critical attitude to all values, *whether* language teachers should aim to teach values as such, and what ethical implications need to be addressed.

Ethical issues in teaching for intercultural citizenship in language education

In the project described above, and others of a similar kind (Byram et al., 2017; Porto & Byram, 2015; Wagner & Li, 2023; Yulita, 2017; Yulita & Porto, 2017), teaching for intercultural citizenship can focus on criticality without attempting to teach specific values such as those in the RFCDC. At the same time, the fact that this kind of teaching goes beyond the usual pedagogical aims and encourages learners to take action in their society, to 'participate' and take 'social responsibility' as the Norwegian and Chinese documents quoted above expect, introduces moral and ethical questions.

For example, there is the question of whether it is right or wrong to ask students to engage in social action in the here and now and, if learners are legally minors, then the responsibilities of teachers are more complex than if they are working with adults. Another issue is whether teachers should avoid imposing their own views about what participation and social responsibility should mean in practice. Should the students be exposed to potentially risky and controversial situations, and if so, how the risks are managed. Answers are inevitably contextualised and there can be no general response, but we present here a discussion of specific locations and contexts which illustrate the discussions which need to take place.

Furthermore, teachers can also be at risk of being criticised for even considering taking such positions, and there are questions about whose role it is to help teachers develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to apply such approaches in education.

Question of values

Although such questions raise ethical issues, they are nonetheless matters of pedagogy. The further step is to consider whether (language) teachers should also introduce new values from other societies which may conflict with those of their learners and their learners' society.

The Association of American Educators has a 'Code of Ethics for Educators' consisting of four principles: ethical conduct towards (1) students, (2) practices and performance, (3) professional colleagues, and (4) parents and community. Principle 1 (ethical conduct towards students) refers to educators' responsibility to teach 'character qualities' which involve what we define as 'criticality':

> The professional educator accepts personal responsibility for teaching students character qualities that will help them *evaluate the consequences of and accept the responsibility for their actions and choices*. We strongly affirm parents as the primary moral educators of their children.

This first principle also includes a statement that certain values should be 'fostered', a term which is ambivalent but which we would include under our understanding of 'teach':

> Nevertheless, we believe *all educators are obligated to help foster civic virtues* such as integrity, diligence, responsibility, cooperation, loyalty, fidelity, and respect-for the law, for human life, for others, and for self.
>
> (https://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/about-us/aae-code-of-ethics, emphasis added, accessed June 2023)

It remains implicit but highly probable that the authors of this statement consider 'civic values' to be those of the society in which learners live.

Principle IV, concerning ethical conduct towards parents and community, is more explicit about values and refers to 'respect' for diverse values and cultures as well as bonds with the community beyond the institution. There is diversity but it remains within the society in which learners live:

> The professional educator endeavours to *understand and respect the values and traditions of the diverse cultures* represented *in the community* and in his or her classroom.
>
> (https://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/about-us/aae-code-of-ethics, emphasis added)

It is important to emphasise that criticality and respect are not mutually exclusive since criticality is a matter of dispassionate critique, not negative criticism. Criticality does not exclude respect.

Such principles are applicable across the curriculum and citizenship educators who send their learners into the local community to be active must face them too. The 'foreignness' of Foreign/World Language Teaching adds, however, a further dimension and does not assume that the focus should be only on civic values as conceived in 'our' society. Unlike subjects such as language arts, literature, history, or geography, which begin with and centre on national language, history, literature and so on, foreign/world language teaching is initially outward-looking, to other countries and their communities and cultures which often have different, sometimes radically different, value systems. This

is not a simple matter since value systems are complex and comprise more than those associated with the 'national group', and it is important to ensure that the word 'culture' is not used as a (false) synonym for 'country'.

The language teacher has to consider their position as they expose learners to different values, and the criteria by which comparisons and judgements are made. It is a challenge which may become more complex when teachers also have to ensure that they acknowledge and provide space for their students' own diverse linguistic and cultural identities, especially important for students with minoritized backgrounds. It is easy to think of contexts in which, say, Spanish-speaking students in an Argentinian context learn English as a world language in a classroom in which some learners speak a different language in the home such as Guarani or Quechua. For such learners, at least three value systems are present: that of Spanish-speaking Argentinians, that of their own community and that of a cultural group they study as part of their learning of English. There are similar examples in many contexts.

We assume that once teachers decide to teach not only criticality but also other value systems, they accept that their teaching is not neutral and that they should help their students to find their role in addressing issues and injustices in the world. There are in principle three main positions which a teacher can take (usefully summarised in Council of Europe, 2015): 'be neutral', 'ensure balance', or 'show commitment'. Being neutral is difficult as teachers need to make choices in their teaching that are often based on their own positions. Furthermore, being neutral is not appropriate or ethical in some cases, as for example when one side involves discrimination or human rights violations. Ensuring balance is equally challenging, not least because materials are presented through certain media and positionings, each necessitating analyses of issues, including those of power imbalances, in order for some sort of balance to be reached. The third option, 'commitment', goes a step further and involves the conscious decision to not only introduce controversial issues but also to make learning transformative for the learner and/or the world beyond the classroom in that they engage in what Barnett (1997) calls transformatory critique. In our example above, we expected both kinds of transformation to occur: students changed their understanding and attitudes about the issue at hand in important ways and also engaged in an action project to address a societal issue.

Question of 'consent' and 'transformation'

The kind of teaching and transformation we have described that involves criticality, specifically at the level of transformatory critique, and other values and action in the world beyond the classroom, comes with additional risks. First, people in the school or wider community might find the topics themselves controversial since certain themes may be emotionally disturbing for students. In this respect, educators and researchers have argued that topics that deal with trauma and pain and awaken discomforting emotions in students still need to be addressed in education but must be done in pedagogically meaningful ways (e.g. Ennser-Kananen, 2016; Zembylas, 2020). The discomforting emotions are not the end point but a pedagogical means:

> the vital educational question should not be how to make students *not* enter the room of unhappiness (…) Instead, the question should be what we, as educators, should do *when* the room emerges, when encountering bad feelings, such as unhappiness, that affect us.

> The question is not how to avoid unhappiness but what comes after unhappiness. (Lie, 2022, pp. 193–194)

Additionally, dealing with topics and people in a variety of contexts outside the classroom and school renders it impossible for the teacher to control every aspect of the project, and this may lead to physical or psychological harm to students and/or the community. There is much work in service learning (for an overview see Baker, 2019) which asks students to engage with the community beyond school walls in general and in language education in particular, including intercultural service learning (e.g. Rauschert and Byram, 2018; Palpacuer Lee et al., 2018), which can be helpful in finding ideas for how to address these risks. In most educational contexts there are additional regulations and/or guidelines for community engagement. Importantly, teachers need to be thoughtful in the planning and implantation of such projects, taking the factors involved, such as the students' age and the particular communities, into account, and to communicate well and openly with everyone. Such open communication also integrates students as active participants and decision-makers which is crucial for the success of such projects (Byram et al., 2021).

Such conversations may, and in our view should, include reflection on informed consent. There are several layers of consent in such projects. For example, do teachers seek consent from their students and/or guardians with regard to their overall participation in the educational project? Do teachers conduct research with the data they collect, or do they share any data collected through the project? In some contexts, there are bodies of oversight in place that regulate research with human subjects or privacy laws such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in the USA 'that protects the privacy of student education records' (https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html, n.d., ¶ 1). Aspects that need to be considered are the students' age and their ability to understand the issue at hand in all its complexity, whether or not there seems to be a choice, or whether there is a perceived power imbalance that leads to pressure to consent to participate in a project.

Teachers have a further level of ethical responsibility if they teach learners who are not yet, at least legally, adults; this is again an issue they share with other teachers. Lower secondary teachers, for example, are in a position of trust which is quite different from that of teachers in higher education whose students are legally responsible for their own actions, even though teachers must be aware that their demands, as people in positions of authority, are sometimes difficult to resist.

However, if teachers commit to enabling their students to transform society, they have to find ways of navigating their particularly challenging position with regard to ethical questions that have consequences for themselves, their students, and the community. We acknowledge the ongoing developments, for example in several states in the USA, where recent legislation prohibits teachers from instructing on topics related to race, specific historical events, and various issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion (USA Facts, 2023). Culture wars making their way into education, however, are not limited to the USA (e.g. in Denmark, Bojsen, 2021; in Russia, Van Esveld, 2022). In such instances, educators encounter additional challenges, the comprehensive discussion of which falls outside the purview of this article. This certainly raises additional ethical concerns for teachers about the positions they can and should take and the potential impact on fostering a well-rounded understanding of society and its complexities.

Conclusion

If language teaching is to have its proper place in education, if it is to be truly humanist and encourage learners to be active participants in the international world, with social responsibilities, if it is to deal with morality, then it has to take a wider curriculum perspective. It has to find a means of collaborating with other subjects and teachers, whilst ensuring that its particular internationalist contribution is recognised. Our purpose has been to demonstrate that considering the particularity of the ethical issues in language teaching provides insight into this often-misunderstood area of the curriculum which other teachers may benefit from. We have suggested the significance of bringing an internationalist perspective to the curriculum and have highlighted the important role that language education can take (Wagner et al., 2019). Language teaching can point the way as it brings the internationalist perspective to issues which are too big for the nation, and which the national education system might treat in a nationalist way.

We have provided an example from language education showing one way in which these questions can be addressed pedagogically, namely by fostering internationalist perspectives which are intercultural and critical and can be integrated across the curriculum. Language education contributes useful insights and frameworks for such intercultural citizenship perspectives. Work along these lines can contribute to fulfilling the educational goal of transforming students and society through education.

Note

1. The ethical dilemmas raised by the introduction and even imposition of specific languages – such as English, Russian and Chinese – as a political, neo-colonial choice, encapsulated in the notion of 'linguistic imperialism', is a different matter beyond the scope of this article but is dealt with by, for instance, Tupas (2015, p. 2019, 2021) who discusses the politics of Englishes today and critically examines the role of language in society and education under globalisation.

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ORCID

Michael Byram http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1116-2366
Melina Porto http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9159-171X
Manuela Wagner http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3618-588X

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