

Ethical issues in teaching for intercultural citizenship in world/foreign language education

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Prologue - 'Green Kidz'

It is the end of year fair at a primary school in Argentina and 5th and 6th graders are distributing leaflets they have created in their English lessons. The message on one of the posters, written in English, Spanish and Danish, is: 'Sorting waste is taking care of the environment. We help you, will you help us?' As guests arrive at the school, they see a banner hung across the street with this same message in Spanish. Children tell the community about the results of the project they have been working on with Danish children. They have taken their learning in the English lessons beyond the classroom: they went to a local square, accompanied by parents, and recorded a song on video about the theme, which they shared on Facebook. They distributed to passers-by a leaflet they had designed, with a call to 'Save electricity' and 'Turn off the light'. They were interviewed by a local journalist, and the banner for the fair and the trilingual posters they had designed with their Danish peers appeared in the local newspaper. They also posted a video summarizing the project on YouTube. In short, they had developed a sense of responsibility to protect the environment and were eager to persuade others to join them.

These are some of the outcomes of a transnational project in two primary English as a Foreign (EFL) classrooms in Argentina and Denmark. The Argentinian children were aged 10-11 years and had an A1 proficiency level in English but were able to work successfully with their Danish peers who were a bit older (12-13 years) and more proficient in English (A2 level).

In the first stage of the project, the children researched about the environment in their own countries. They identified 'green' crimes (i.e. wasteful use of energy or other resources) in their schools and neighborhoods, which they documented with videos and photographs. They analyzed the waste bins in their schools and produced a report. They surveyed relatives and friends to learn about their environmental habits. Each class then shared their analyses with the other, in English, using a wiki they called *Worldgreenweb* in a-synchronous communication. Parents also accessed the wiki and commented.

In the next stage, the children met their peers via Skype. They had many questions to ask: they wanted to know what music the others liked, what their city looked like. The Argentinian children were thrilled to see their partners' faces: 'You're all blond'. The Danish children were surprised: 'You

have computers'. Small talk of this kind challenged their preconceptions and prejudices about each other. English, Spanish and Danish were heard.

Then the collaborative task of designing an awareness-raising poster began. With the help of a worksheet and supported by their teachers, they discussed the purpose and content of their posters, and the languages they would use in them. Using all the languages in their repertoires ensured efficient communication and fostered critical language awareness. They drew on the discoveries they had shared in the wiki about how people in each country take care of the environment and thus developed 'internationalist' perspectives about the theme. They called themselves the 'Green Kidz Argentina-Denmark group', a new international identity.

In the last stage, they took their work into their community. The Argentinian children carried out the various activities with which this vignette began. In Denmark, the children also distributed the posters in their community, wrote a letter to the local newspaper, posted information about the project on the newspaper's Facebook page and informed Greenpeace Denmark and Greenpeace International about the project.

Introduction

The teachers in this project are convinced that language teaching is not only instrumental in the sense of teaching a language for work, study, travel or other practical purposes but also educational (Author), and that the two are not mutually exclusive but mutually enriching. 'Educational' means that language teaching can and should contribute to fostering the development of the self and of democratic and peaceful societies. These instrumental and educational purposes rest on two models of education, the former based on competency and the latter on humanism (Zovko & Dillon, 2018), and Nussbaum argues that a humanist education is "crucial to the formation of citizenship [and] must be cultivated if democracies are to survive" (2006:388). There is however a further dimension to this view of language teaching, for adding the demands of a humanist education is an ethical decision (Zovko & Dillon, 2018) in the face of the current accountability and performance worries of schools (Spaine Long, 2013; Wurr, 2013).

One kind of language teaching that combines instrumental and humanist educational purposes focuses on intercultural citizenship (Author). Intercultural citizenship involves more than teaching linguistic and communicative competence; it includes teaching intercultural competence and citizenship responsibilities, as our prologue shows. This approach meets what Brady (2006: 230) calls "students' needs to connect the language they study to the real concerns they have in their lives about school,

relationships, their identity formation, their curiosity, their uncertainty, and their worries about the future” and Williams (2017: 61) argues that language learning conceived in this way “can enhance our intellectual, moral and civic resources, including our sensitivity to nuances in human relationships”. Intercultural citizenship is then an “educational philosophy” (Author: 73) that aims to make language teaching relevant to students’ lives, engaging them both in learning the language and in their development and application of intercultural competence. As such, it also requires a reconfiguration of the vision of education that teachers have, with new teacher roles and a new teacher professional identity beyond that of trainer of competences and transmitter of knowledge.

The teachers in this project believe that language teaching can put into practice the principles outlined above and contribute to developing democratic values in students by encouraging them to work actively with others to improve the world. In other words, they are implementing intercultural citizenship theory (Author). Simultaneously with their language learning, students are encouraged to engage in community action that can be characterized as social or civic (e.g. designing an awareness-raising leaflet and distributing it in the local community, designing a street banner, reaching Greenpeace International). The Green Kidz example suggests that introducing topics relevant beyond the borders of particular nations leads to learners being strongly motivated to see connections with significant related experiences in their specific contexts and to seek collaborative global solutions that emerge from local needs. They do so by working with transnational peers, in this case peers with a different first language and cultural background, using English as a lingua franca. The teachers have chosen to see their learners as people in society with the potential to become active in the here and now. Language teaching in this sense is ‘political’ where ‘political’ means ‘taking an interest and action in improving the community/communities in which one lives’.

This leads to a new issue for language teachers, which is the focus of this article. While intercultural citizenship language teaching has been shown to motivate learners and improve their language learning (Author), which teachers always welcome, it also raises ethical issues. Teachers make decisions about and for their learners, with respect to content, teaching methods, assumptions about learning processes and what learners ‘do’ with their learning. Such decisions are taken from a position of power bestowed by education systems and by traditions of acceptance by students of teacher roles and identities. When decisions affect only what happens in the classroom and the acquisition of knowledge and skills in a discipline, the expertise of the teacher as a professional is usually welcome. In the example above however, the classroom is not the only location of learning, and learning of the discipline is not the only focus, a situation which we consider to be an educational ideal. Yet, when teachers plan for learners to become engaged outside the classroom with societal matters like the environment, new ethical issues emerge.

In this article we shall first briefly describe the theoretical basis for language teaching for intercultural citizenship in order then to address these issues. We do not provide recipe answers but analyse what teachers need to think about and decide for themselves.

Foreign language education as Intercultural Citizenship Education

Theory

The theory of intercultural citizenship education is a combination of a model of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (Byram 1997) and competences for ‘learning democracy’ (*Demokratielernen*) (Himmelmann 2001). In essence, the combination adds to the aims of language teaching the notion of ‘action in the community’ taken from education for citizenship. Learning democracy is not restricted to voting or participating in politics. It means working with others collaboratively to imagine solutions to significant problems or issues and materializing those solutions in concrete social or civic action in the community. This occurs simultaneously with the language learning that takes place in the classroom; in other words, it occurs in the here and now of learners’ lives. Intercultural citizenship also enriches education for citizenship and ‘learning democracy’, which is usually focused on learners’ own state and society, by turning learners’ attention outwards beyond the boundaries of their state and encouraging communication with students in other countries. As learners in each country seek solutions collaboratively to a particular problem or issue using a foreign language or a lingua franca, they consider other perspectives to the issue, beyond the national, and develop ‘intercultural’ citizenship. The principles of the combination are presented in Byram (2008) and the ways in which these principles can be applied are presented in Byram et al. (2017).

As an example of language teaching as intercultural citizenship education, the Green Kidz project has four essential elements (Author):

- 1) citizenship is the content of lessons and addresses themes of social significance such as the environment;
- 2) students from two or more countries collaborate in a transnational project, using digital technologies, to develop a sense of transnational identification;
- 3) students in each school analyze their taken-for-granted beliefs about the theme and challenge them with the help of the perspectives of the other;
- 4) students engage in critical thinking and take action in the community (at local, regional, national or global levels).

Ethical options

In planning lessons which lead to the kind of activities described in the prologue, teachers need to be aware that such projects tend to focus on controversial issues. The example given appears to deal with a matter which would attract consensus: the protection of the environment and the role of recycling and 'green crimes' - who would not be in favour of protection of the environment? Yet the very phrase 'green crimes' makes a moral judgement about people's behaviors, and such topics can be misconstrued as partisan issues and lead to opposition by parents, the administration or students themselves. Consensus on what is appropriate behavior towards the environment may quickly break into controversy.

The teacher's position in this context is not without impact on how learners think and act, and for many language teachers, this is a new experience. Teaching controversial issues is familiar ground to, for example, history, geography and science teachers, as well as most obviously for teachers of citizenship education, and they will all have discussed the implications during their training courses. Language teachers are unlikely to have done so, and may therefore be wary of the kind of teaching we are advocating. Help is however available.

Teaching in other disciplines has shown that there are three positions which teachers can in principle take. The first is to be 'neutral' with respect to controversial issues. Even if they have taken the responsibility of introducing a controversial issue, as in the experimental work described here - as opposed to having it determined for them by a prescribed syllabus - they can attempt to ensure that their own views do not intrude and are not made known to learners. This is however very difficult since whatever teaching materials are chosen or teaching method used, there are inevitably choices made and biases introduced.

A second option is to ensure 'balance'. In this case, the teacher's responsibility is to ensure that all possible perspectives on a controversial issue are presented equally. This may not be easy either, since every perspective is presented through a document or a text and a medium - using these terms in their most inclusive sense - and every presentation involves a rhetoric, whether it is 'sober', 'persuasive', 'inflammatory' or whatever. The teacher's responsibility therefore includes ensuring that learners grasp the import of the rhetoric and its potential impact on them. A 'balanced' approach also allows a teacher to set aside their 'neutrality' and make their own views known, provided they ensure that their learners recognise the teacher's own rhetorical power as 'an authority' because they are 'a teacher'.

The third option is 'commitment'. This means teachers going beyond sharing their own views with learners. It involves a prior decision to give direction to their learners' learning. In addition to deciding that their lessons should include controversial issues, they decide that learning should become

‘transformative’ in either or both of two senses. First, transformation can be focused on the learners, on creating learning situations which will change their understanding of and attitudes to the world and to themselves in non-trivial and irreversible ways. Second, transformation can be focused on the world beyond the classroom, the society in which the school or university is located, with the intention of creating social change.

Transformation thus engenders a sense of identity, of agency and of empowerment, an awareness in learners of who they are, what they can do and how they can respond to problems in the world which, together, give them a sense of purpose, that they can ‘use what they learn for the greater good’ (LTE White Paper, 2019: 8). The project described above was clearly intended to be transformative in this sense. It also meets the goals of learners enacting their role as ‘transformative citizens’ who ‘take action to implement and promote policies, actions, and changes that are consistent with values such as human rights, social justice, and equality’ (Banks 2017: 266). Banks argues that such actions may lead to violation of laws - and he gives as examples Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks - but this is perhaps the extreme case and, in the project in question, learners were not being incited by their teachers to violate laws. They did however attempt to persuade their fellow citizens - including adults older than themselves - to take action, and this implies that they themselves had undergone transformation. Like all kinds of learning, it may have begun before the project but the project as planned by teachers reinforced the transformation, and learners became active citizens. Did they know before they began that this would be the outcome? Did they (or their parents) consent in advance? This is another ethical matter.

Informed consent?

In fact, since the learners were children, their parents gave ‘informed consent’ on their behalf. Yet this is not as simple as it might seem. How ‘informed’ was their consent? Should parents have been explicitly told that a ‘controversial topic’ would be addressed and that involvement in socio-political ‘action in the community’ would be encouraged? Does the fact that learners were children mean that they did not have the right to know before they began that this was what their teachers planned for them? These are some of the ethical questions raised.

First we can say that since this was a project accompanied by university researchers, there is a level of ethical control by university authorities. Although this differs from country to country, such control is usually limited to seeking an assurance that no harm will be done to participants. Transformation is however a different matter from harm.

To pursue a more nuanced view, we can say, with Yacek (2020) that there is an illogicality in asking

learners to consent to transformation, the nature of which they cannot know in advance for that is the very essence of transformation. Transformation involves risk and Yacek suggests that, although the risk cannot be eradicated, there is a way of 'buffering the transformative education environment' (p. 269), which involves transcending the relationships of the classroom - and the sole responsibilities of the individual teacher - by including a wider community. This can be, Yacek suggests, a disciplinary community and in our case this means the community of those involved in education for intercultural citizenship. Teachers and learners - and in some cases their parents - cooperate to ensure that transformative learning focused on the learner is supported by the ideals of the disciplinary community.

Transformation of society is a separate if related matter. Critical pedagogy, rooted in the work of Freire, advocates that learners should become transformatory intellectuals willing and ready to transform their society, and to do so in ways which promote social justice. Barnett (1997) too has argued that university education should lead learners to become critical and ready to change not only themselves but also the society in which they live; he uses the iconic photograph of a Chinese student, 'Tank man', stopping a line of tanks before the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. University students are adults who can take responsibility for their own actions, and other projects have worked with university students (Author). This is not to say that they are not susceptible to influence from their teachers, or that teachers are absolved of ethical responsibilities, but learners in schools are children and the situation is very different. Teachers who encourage, or even incite, learners to transform their society and community thus have a particularly complex position vis á vis learners and parents/guardians. Their position is also subject to their relationship to their 'employer'. In some countries teachers are civil servants and directly employed by the state. In others they are employed by an institution which is independent of the state, whether school or university.

There can be no recipe for how to act, except perhaps that there shall be a basis for all decision-making and action in human rights and democracy, even if these are themselves contestable. Teachers must be aware of their position and make their own decisions.

What does all this mean for practice? In summary, we have argued here that teachers have in principle three options with controversial issues but, when they plan for their learners to be involved in action in the community, teachers are obliged to choose the option of 'commitment'. They can and should ensure 'balance' but their planning will encourage or require learners to act. 'Balance' therefore may include a presentation of their own view with the caveat that it is from an 'authority' and can and should be challenged.

They cannot ask for 'informed consent' since learners (or parents/guardians) cannot be 'informed' of

the change they have not yet experienced and cannot yet know. Teachers can and should therefore make their pedagogical decisions in full cognisance of the disciplinary community to which they belong and full awareness of the risks they are expecting their learners to run.

Questions of risk

Teachers therefore need to consider how they will deal with the potential risks and/or dangers their students can be exposed to inside the classroom, including through online communication, but especially when they interact, often with strangers, outside the classroom. Because of the nature of controversial topics, some students, parents, other teachers, or administrators, may find classroom discussions of them inappropriate, difficult or even traumatizing. In this context, the position we have described as ‘commitment’ has a practical dimension. For example, in the USA, there has been a debate about whether teachers should include “trigger warnings” in their syllabi when they cover topics they fear might cause anxiety or trauma in students (George & Hovey, 2019). Some scholars have argued that trauma and pain are not only unavoidable but even necessary, and that they can become an opening in education when addressed pedagogically (Enns-Kananen, 2016; Zembylas, 2015, 2020). In any case, teachers should carefully consider the context in which a project takes place. Depending on the age of the students there will likely be different restrictions and regulations shared by the school/university as well as general laws and regulations that can help them determine what can be considered safe. For example, elementary school students should not interact with others online (or outside the school) without supervision while older students would be able to work more independently.

With respect to activities outside the classroom and ‘action in the community’, the risks include possible physical harm as the environment the students are in is much less controlled than in the classroom. Students could have accidents, be subject to physical or verbal abuse, just to name a few risks, but helpful guidelines on risks and liability exist (e.g. Center for Civic Advancement (n.d.)) although teachers need to be aware of their local regulatory conditions. Furthermore, in many places around the globe characterized as teaching contexts “with difficult circumstances” (Kuchah Kuchah, 2018, p.4), that is, generally under-resourced and very often with inhospitable conditions (Kuchah Kuchah & Shamin, 2018), teachers may have to make their own decisions. Work in ‘service learning’ and particularly in ‘intercultural service learning’ (Byram and Rauschert 2017) is a source of ideas and stimulus for reflection (e.g. Bringle et al 2011).

Perhaps the most important lesson we learned from our projects in schools and universities (Author)

is that open communication is crucial. Teachers must, obviously, take into consideration questions of learners' age, the nature of the community and the potential dangers involved in interaction with members of it, but we recommend anticipating and discussing possible dangers and ways of addressing and reporting them with students and, if learners are under age, with their parents. These conversations serve multiple roles. They 1) engage students as agents and decision-makers in the process, rather than passive recipients of instruction; 2) enable teachers to scaffold the process of thinking through various scenarios, thereby preparing students with possible actions in response to dangers; 3) keep all channels of communication open and all stakeholders in the loop, increasing the likelihood of good collaboration when problems occur; and 4) prepare students for 'action in the world/community'. This practice reinforces the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intercultural citizenship while also empowering students to develop their identities, agency, and purpose.

Conclusion

Starting from the view that language teaching should have more than just instrumental purposes and include teaching intercultural citizenship, we have discussed the nature of transformative teaching. With respect to transformative change in society or community, there is a continuum from committed critical pedagogy which incites change to a legal and moral commitment to society and the state which demands loyalty from its teachers as employees. The position of the teacher as a potential instigator of societal change has to be thought through by each teacher for themselves. Secondly, transformative teaching which aims to create non-trivial changes in learners also creates ethical dilemmas, including in particular the notion of 'informed consent'. In fine, this approach to teaching thus involves ethical responsibilities and has implications related to the purposes and content of language teaching as well as to the role and identity of teachers as well as students.

We have illustrated some of the issues involved using the Green Kidz project. As the Argentinian and Danish children engaged in communication, a strong bond among them developed despite initial prejudice and stereotyping. They were transformed by becoming 'politically engaged' by which we mean that they developed their own ideas and commitments and became involved in public life in their communities, challenging when necessary the *status quo*. They reflected on and formed their identities and developed a sense of agency and purpose (Author).

Teachers, too, changed in identity from being 'language teachers' to 'teachers of language and intercultural citizenship' (Author). The role of teachers when students become engaged in this way is thus ultimately a deep professional question to which there are no simple superficial answers.

Our aim has been to raise all these questions for debate.

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