

From principles to practice in education for intercultural citizenship (a review)

Original work by Michael Byram, Irina Golubeva, Han Hui and Manuela Wagner (Eds.)

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Published as part of the ICE series of *Languages for Intercultural Communication and Education* this is a survey of how students and teachers around the world perceive the concept of intercultural citizenship and how intercultural citizenship can be developed and taught as part of the foreign language teaching syllabus. In doing so, it describes surveys and projects carried out in countries as far apart as China, the USA, Japan, Argentina, Denmark, Korea, Taiwan and Italy. It also explores peace studies in the Malvinas / Falkland Islands, sport and sustainability and the role of intercultural citizenship in protecting human rights.

The authorship is the result of an unusual coming together of teachers and researchers interested in intercultural education and involved in a collective research venture under the umbrella

organisation of the Cultnet Research Group, founded by Michael Byram and colleagues. As Professor Martyn Barrett explains in his foreword, the group undertook a range of projects involving cooperation between language learners in different countries. As a result of these projects, teachers and learners in different groups bonded and formed and built new intercultural and citizenship awareness. In doing so, they built an understanding of two concepts crucial to civic and citizenship education – global citizenship and intercultural citizenship.

The book is divided into three sections. Section 1 examines learners' and teachers' perceptions of intercultural citizenship. Section 2 reports on activities carried out by teachers in class collaborating across borders. Section 3

examines how language learners cooperate across borders and include collaborative projects based on human rights, peace building and even mural art and graffiti.

There is a fairly common belief in language education that intercultural understanding and intercultural citizenship is a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) topic or topics that can only be dealt with at higher intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency. Many of the projects described in this book contest that idea. For example, Section 2 begins with a project involving international students studying Japanese at CEFR A2 level and comparing education systems and values in the students' different countries. Using Japanese as the basic means of communication supplemented by English where necessary, young university students surveyed education provision, policy and the cost of education in their respective countries in different countries and compared and discussed results. In doing so they learned not only about different education systems but also learned to question the assumptions behind the information.

For Byram and his colleagues this is an important feature of intercultural citizenship, the development of 'criticality', defined as the ability to develop critical awareness and to question the assumptions behind the facts. In undertaking these projects, the authors argue, students learn and use

language, improve their language skills and broaden their awareness of the world and develop the critical skills to analyse and also empathise with people in similar situations, like education, in other environments. In doing so, the students develop the key qualities of intercultural citizenship as put forward by Oxfam in *Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools*. A Global Citizen is someone who (1) is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen; (2) respects and values diversity; (3) has an understanding of how the world works; (4) is outraged by social injustice; (5) participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global; (6) is willing to act to make the world a more sustainable place; (7) takes responsibility for their actions.

A strong feature of the book is a description of projects and their results and particularly in Chapter 3 entitled *Intercultural Encounters in Teacher Education* a number of experiential learning mini-projects that teachers and students can try in class. Each project describes the aims of the project and the students who took part and explains the preparation progress and how the project was carried out. But the authors also describe and quote students' reactions, which shows how their views expand and their intercultural awareness grows through taking part in the project. Finally, the feedback session on each project identifies successes and challenges

students and teachers faced and how they were dealt with.

The book describes projects carried out at all levels of the education systems including primary and lower secondary, high school, university undergraduate and pre-service teacher training, demonstrating the key components of intercultural citizenship education in language learning specified by Byram in *Intercultural Citizenship and Foreign Language Education* as (1) learning more about one's own country by comparison; (2) learning more about 'otherness' in one's own country (especially linguistic / ethnic minorities); (3) becoming involved in activity outside school; (4) making class-to-class links to compare and act on a topic in two or more countries.

An interesting example of schoolchildren from different countries is described in *Green Kidz* where 12 to 13-year-old students in Copenhagen took part in a joint project on climate change and sustainability with students from a school in La Plata, Argentina. Inspired by the UN Climate Change summit in Copenhagen in 2009, the students decided to take a more activist approach on its conclusions and produced videos and a Facebook page on climate change and sustainability. Although originally a Natural Sciences project, *Green Kidz* then became a language project and the school found a partner in Argentina. In 16 lessons spread over three months

the two schools exchanged information and ideas using English as a lingua franca, Spanish and Danish through videos, SKYPE meetings, emails, blogs, Facebook and other media outlets.

The topics included *My School, My Community and My Family, Green Crimes in School and in the Community* and designing slogans and posters to encourage the school and community to deal with waste, avoid pollution and protect the environment.

According to the project evaluation and feedback, the project raised awareness and promoted action and also encouraged a spirit of co-operation practically and linguistically in the use of *we* and *our* as well as a focus on the vocabulary of agreement and cooperation. Above all, the project contributed to the development of an internationalist outlook and respect for two communities with very different backgrounds and histories (and to some extent, lifestyles and school behaviour, such as wearing or not wearing uniforms).

Inevitably there are challenges. Time is one. The school language syllabus is already crowded and taking time to develop language skills through intercultural citizenship projects may put a strain on the programme. On the other hand, the rapid development in fluency and confidence in using a foreign language and developing critical

awareness skills more than compensates.

Target language levels is another. Some students may feel frustrated and even demotivated by their perceived inability to deal with the topic at the level required. Feedback suggests that if the topic is interesting enough students will apply themselves to it and if the teacher can support them by suggesting simpler language to use it will be important, especially at lower levels of language learning.

Mismatched expectations are another potential cause of frustration, especially in cross-border projects. Students in country A may have different expectations from students in country B. The important thing is to have common expectations right from the start and as the project evolves any disagreements can be the subject of discussion leading to resolution. That after all, is part of the strategy of building intercultural citizenship – empathy with and harmonising different expectations.

Finally, many of the topics are highly sensitive, such as human rights and ‘action in the community’. These need to be dealt with sensitively by teachers and students in a way that

issues can be raised for discussion and political limitations of that discussion are recognised and dealt with. Once again, awareness of and sensitivity towards dealing with international issues is once again an important aspect of intercultural citizenship.

The central message of this book is that citizenship training, particularly intercultural citizenship, can be brought into language learning and teaching. In fact, in many international language learning textbooks topics on climate change and human rights and the importance of intercultural awareness are already part of the course design. In the opinion of the editors, the key needs are: what is still experimental in our language classrooms needs to become routine; teacher education is a key to successful introduction of intercultural citizenship projects and international co-operation into language classes at all levels; and it is vital that management of student expectations should enable students to feel confident and engaged in dealing with intercultural citizenship issues in their language.

In our challenging times this is an informative book with many practical ideas for projects with a noble aim in our accelerating globalising world.