Developing intercultural citizenship education in foreign language classroom practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a collaborative project about developing intercultural citizenship education in foreign language classrooms in ten universities in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. The aim of the project is to combine language and citizenship education, and to demonstrate how the introduction of subject matter and principles from citizenship education into foreign language education gives meaning to language education beyond its instrumental function, and extends citizenship education beyond a focus on the national. The project used Barnett's (1997) classification of criticality in education systems and Byram's (2008) five levels of civic engagement. The project has been arranged in three sections. Section 1 considers how learners and teachers think about key concepts of the project. Section 2 contains examples of how teachers can cooperate to work in parallel with their learners. Section 3 describes learners of different ages and how different levels of linguistic competence can be taught on the basis of the principles of the project. The project contributes to developing intercultural citizenship, intercultural competence, and criticality in the language classroom.

Keywords

Intercultural citizenship education, intercultural communicative competence, foreign language classroom

Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce a collaborative project about developing intercultural citizenship education in the foreign language classroom in ten universities in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. This project formed part of an informal network of researchers called 'Cultnet' [based at the University of Durham, UK]. The aim of the project is to combine language and citizenship education and to demonstrate how the introduction of subject matter and principles from citizenship education into foreign language education gives meaning to language education beyond its instrumental function and extends citizenship education beyond a focus on the national. Under the leadership of Michael Byram, curriculum development projects involving at least two countries each were planned in 2011–12. Since then, ten projects have been carried out in Argentina, China, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Each project is an empirical classroom study integrating intercultural communicative competence and civic action in the intercultural citizenship community.

Methods

The project used Barnett's (1997) classification of criticality in education systems and Byram's (2008) five levels of civic engagement. Barnett's classification includes three domains: (a) propositions, ideas and theories; (b) the internal world, i.e. a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical self-reflection and the external world, and (c) a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical action. Byram's five levels of civic engagement are as follows: (1) Learners engage with others and reflect critically on their own assumptions, and those of others. (2) Learners engage with others, reflect critically and propose/imagine possible alternatives and changes. (3) Learners engage with others, seeking their perspective/advice, reflect critically, propose change and take action to instigate change in their own society. (4) Learners create a transnational community with others, reflect together, propose and instigate

change in their respective societies. (5) In a transnational community, learners from two or more societies identify an issue, which they act on as a transnational group.

Results

The initiative was implemented in three stages: planning (2011–2012), execution (2012–2014) and evaluation (ongoing since the beginning). A book describing the outcomes of the project (Byram, Golubeva, Han, & Wagner, 2016) has been published by Multilingual Matters. The chapters are arranged in three sections.

Section 1 "The Baseline: Learners' and Teachers' Perceptions of Intercultural Citizenship" contains three chapters. Chapter 1 uses a comparison and contrast between the United States and Hungary to characterise how university-level learners understand the concept of 'intercultural citizen' and 'global citizen'. Chapter 2 is based on a survey of learners' perspectives on intercultural citizenship at universities in China. Chapter 3 addresses the question of teacher training and identity where the teacher and students in Sweden write about an intercultural course.

Section 2 "Teachers Cooperating" includes Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 describes the intercultural approaches of two teachers teaching intercultural citizenship with English and Japanese learners in lower level language classes in Japan and Taiwan. Chapter 5 introduces how two teachers incorporate environmental action into intercultural dialogue in a common online course at university in Japan and Taiwan.

Section 3 "Learners Cooperating" includes Chapters 6–10. Chapter 6 reports young learners engaged in intercultural environmental citizenship in English language classrooms in Argentina and Denmark. The learners talked about environmental protection, and acquired the skills of criticality. They then took action in their own communities as a consequence of their work in the classroom. Chapter 7 describes two groups of undergraduates and graduates who talk about their own language and culture learning in the United States and Korea. Chapter 8 describes a project where university learners were in direct contact with each other, discussing mural art and graffiti of Argentineans and Italians. In Chapters 9 and 10, two authors describe a first project where their Argentinean learners of English and British learners of Spanish engage with the sensitive topic of war between the two countries. The authors then describe a second project

where new groups of language learners deal with the sensitive historical topic of how Argentinean learners define their country's history and interact with British university learners.

Discussion and Conclusion

Each of the ten projects was conceived as a curriculum development experiment designed to test the transferability of the theoretical principles and philosophical rationale behind intercultural citizenship education to the language classroom. The projects were successful in providing opportunities for students to use languages for meaningful content related to citizenship and an intercultural perspective, and also in demonstrating how the combination of language and citizenship education leads to significant developments in learners' lives in three dimensions: a) self and intercultural awareness, b) criticality and attention to social justice, and c) a sense of bonding amongst students which indicates the emergence of a new social identity of being 'internationalist'.

The results reveal that intercultural citizenship learning could be categorized with respect to (1) content, (2) technology, (3) intercultural communication, (4) critical self-reflection, and (5) critical action in the world. This project contributes to nurturing citizens with key democratic competences. Citizenship becomes the content of foreign language teaching. The intercultural citizenship competences can be developed in the language classroom, and criticality is also an intended outcome. The approach contributes to bridging social divides as students from different countries work collaboratively in a transnational project and develop a strong sense of bonding called 'international/transnational identification'.

References

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