

Book and media reviews

Cosmopolitanism and language education

Römhild, R., Marxl, A., Matz, F. & Siepmann, P. (Eds.) (2023). *Rethinking Cultural Learning: Cosmopolitan Perspectives on Language Education*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier. 242 pp. € 29,50 (paperback) ISBN: 978-3-98940-005-4.

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Rethinking Cultural Learning: Cosmopolitan Perspectives on Language Education is an ambitious and comprehensive edited book that proposes that language education has more than instrumental purposes and can play an important role in helping students engage in the transformations needed to address current global challenges. Ricardo Römhild, Anika Marxl, Frauke Matz and Philipp Siepmann argue that existing intercultural and transcultural frameworks in English language education have thus far been inadequate and suggest the advantages of re-locating the notion of cultural learning through the lens of cosmopolitan perspectives. The book is timely and relevant and would certainly be a good fit for language and intercultural communication teachers and researchers as well as those involved with citizenship education, global education, sustainability, social justice, and human rights, among other fields, in varied roles and capacities. Readers will find a sound multidisciplinary foundation that can be used as a springboard for reflection, evaluation and action. For the novice stakeholder, however, the text might prove dense and obscure at times as it presupposes a knowledgeable and well-informed reader.

The theme is complex and multifaceted. While in general there is agreement in the literature that it is important to cultivate in students a willingness and disposition to actively engage

with contemporary global issues and to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to achieve this goal (Biesta, 2023; Schultz & Blom, 2023), the epistemological, philosophical and theoretical foundations underlying cosmopolitan perspectives are varied, intricate and often conflicting. The book does a good job in unpacking such perspectives.

In the introductory chapter, (Re)-Discovering cosmopolitanism for language education, the editors set the theoretical basis of their case. It involves the cultivation in students of heightened awareness of global risks and challenges, critical reflection, civic responsibility, and commitment to action. It is based on three pillars: cosmopolitanism, global citizenship, and human rights. The main argument is that a critical cosmopolitan perspective as proposed in the book is novel and different from existing intercultural and transcultural conceptualizations of cultural learning. The book is then divided into two parts. Part I, 'Rethinking cultural learning – interdisciplinary underpinnings of cosmopolitanism', comprises four chapters and discusses cosmopolitan citizenship approaches to English language education drawing on educational philosophy, citizenship education, international law, and human rights education. Part II, 'Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education', consisting of eight chapters, focuses on approaches and perspectives for the English language classroom such as cultural and literary learning, peace education, fake news, language variation, and sustainability education. Surprisingly, there is no final chapter with conclusions and implications. The book as a whole draws on the experiences and practices at the University of Münster in Germany.

In Chapter 2, Liz Jackson presents a historical overview and development of the origins of cosmopolitan ideas and a discussion of different discourses of global citizenship education. In Chapter 3 William Gaudelli introduces three principles of global citizenship education, namely the interdependence of being, the learner as a knowledge creator, and the transformation of knowledge into social action. Then Moritz Vormbaum and Marian Yankson-Mensah in Chapter 4 introduce the perspective of international law in human rights with attention to their current contested nature and their evolution. Hugh Starkey's Chapter 5 presents a cosmopolitan citizenship education perspective in foreign language education that calls for the endorsement of a human rights framework that is responsive to and supportive of local conditions and struggles.

Moving to Part II, Anika Marxl and Ricardo Römhild (Chapter 6) explore critical discourse literacy from the perspective of cosmopolitan language education and illustrate it with one frequent theme in the classroom, the family. In Chapter 7, Irene Heidt and Britta Freitag-Hild, drawing on critical literacy and symbolic competence, introduce a critical approach to global citizenship education in cultural learning that unpacks structural inequalities through teaching materials writing and development. Werner Delanoy in Chapter 8 re-designs the notion of cultural learning vis-à-vis global citizenship education, highlighting the role of multimodality,

symbolic competence and conflict mediation, and illustrates it with a short story for the English language classroom. In Chapter 9, Ricardo Römhild and Philipp Meer discuss the concept of Global Englishes Language Teaching, deconstructing notions such as the ownership of English and target cultures. In Chapter 10, Julia Reckermann and Ulrike Gut follow up with the role of English as a *lingua franca*, suggesting that an exploration of Nigerian English can enable learners to participate in critical discourses on global issues. Then Bärbel Diehr in Chapter 11 highlights the importance of addressing fake news to promote critical news literacy with a human rights framework. Frauke Matz in Chapter 12 addresses peace education in the field of language education. Finally, in Chapter 13 Ricardo Römhild, Philipp Siepmann and Janine Bruns discuss the ways in which English language education can contribute to sustainable development, reporting on a lesson unit centred around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Attention to sustainability and the role of English language education beyond schools and universities in the face of what the co-editors call 'global polycrisis' is to be commended and it is in tune with current calls in English language teaching to secure a liveable planet (e.g. Goulah, 2017; Goulah & Katunich, 2020; Porto, 2024; Putri, 2018). Overall, an empirical foundation would have strengthened the book's overarching argument. The examples provided using, for example, teaching materials, sample themes applied to different levels of proficiency, and literary texts, are appealing but could have benefited from further empirical support in order to complement the proposed approach. For instance, how do sustainability, social justice, human rights, and conflict resolution discourses (among many others) operate within cosmopolitan perspectives in English language education in specific sites of engagement? Further research along these lines might demonstrate concretely the real contributions that English language education can make.

To conclude, this book brings to the foreground an array of challenging and intricate concepts and invites a much-needed debate. The comprehensive and ambitious scope of the book is welcomed and deserves special acknowledgement. However, a word of caution is in order at least for the expert reader who will spot some theoretical inaccuracies which seriously undermine the essence of the proposed line of argumentation. One example comes from the two tenets on which the book rests: '(1) the prioritization of the national category over others in intercultural conceptions, and (2) the prioritization of functionality over reflexivity and criticality in cultural learning' (p. 5), particularly in reference to Michael Byram's work. This is, in my view, a misinterpretation as noted by the Byram himself (2021) and it is unfortunate that it is reiterated throughout the book. 'Culture' is not equated with 'national culture'. In fact, Byram questions the tradition of foreign language teaching to analyse exclusively in terms of national divisions, national identity, and the 'culture' of a dominant social and economic elite. He proposes an approach focusing on processes and methods of analysing social

processes and their outcomes, taking seriously the issues of social power and providing learners with critical tools to develop a critical understanding of their own and other societies. This critical and comparative perspective is the foundation of his notion of '*savoir s'engager*/critical cultural awareness'. Another example concerns peace education, where the understanding seems to be that Oxford et al.'s (2021) approach is 'soft' and consequently not critical or transformative. However, the critical nature of peacebuilding in Oxford's (2013) multidimensional peace model is reflected in the multifaceted ways in which it is embedded in the language classroom, involving social, emotional, cognitive, contemplative, experiential, embodied and reflective learning. Thus the approach cannot be other than transformative. In addition, peace in Oxford et al.'s (2021) view refers to harmony achieved by working productively with conflict, and this is positive peace but not depicted as the absence of something undesirable. It is positive peace that draws on positive psychology theory within a transformative perspective where the fairness, equity and socially just foundation of human rights is enhanced (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023).

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