Developing Critical Cultural and Digital Literacy

From Primary School to Teacher Education and Back

Eleni Louloudi[1,*], Lotta König[1,*] & Peter Schildhauer[1,*]

[1] *Universität Bielefeld*
[*] *Kontakt: Universität Bielefeld,*
Fakultät für Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft,
Universitätsstr. 25, 33615 Bielefeld
eleni.louloudi@uni-bielefeld.de; lotta.koenig@uni-bielefeld.de;
peter.schildhauer@uni-bielefeld.de

Abstract: In this contribution, we propose *critical literacy* as a concept that allows to anchor democratic education in foreign language teaching, namely in the context of cultural and digital learning. We suggest a framework for planning teaching units and present practical examples based on ethnographic research on *critical literacy* education in Canada, which span the full range from primary school to teacher training at university. On this basis, we discuss implications and further questions related to democratic education in the first phase of teacher training at Bielefeld University and beyond.

Keywords: critical literacy, social justice education, cultural learning, digitalization, foreign language teaching, teacher training, kulturelles Lernen, Digitalisierung, Fremdsprachenunterricht, Lehramtsausbildung, Lehrer*innenbildung

1   Introduction

The call for democracy education across all subjects in and through teacher education has a renewed urgency due to current social developments: the rise of populism, an increase of right-wing ideology at the center of society, widening gaps of social inequalities still exacerbated in times of a pandemic and – as a risk as well as potential for democracy education – the dynamics of digitalization, just to name a few. From the perspective of foreign language teaching, we see our contribution to democracy education as an integral part of teaching languages and their cultures with texts and (digital) media. These subjects lend themselves to raising an awareness of the underlying ideological ideas and power structures that surface in cultural productions and behaviour and to reflect on how to take (political) action (e.g. The New London Group, 1996). However, this implicit potential for democracy education continually needs to be made explicit and emphasized in teacher education and we need to establish (more) practical frameworks which anchor democracy education in language education.

As a resource for addressing this challenge, we can look at best practice examples from educational systems of our target languages. In this contribution, we therefore consider the concept of social justice education and the teaching of critical literacy as pursued in Canada as a useful approach to democracy education as they allow for a reflection on structural inequalities both in the studied subjects and within the educational setting itself: As part of democracy education, social justice education (SJE) aims to "enable individuals to develop the critical analytic tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems" (Bell, 2007, p. 4), and to help them foster change within these systems. While still hardly traceable in German foreign language learning curricula and classrooms (cf. Gerlach, 2020), SJE has been highly influential in Canada, where the concept emphasizes the need for educators to "recognize and seek to redress the marginalization of traditionally disadvantaged students, including those who are immigrants and from the working class" (Burke, Johnston & Ward, 2017, p. 3). In the Canadian curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) and in practice (Roberge, 2013), SJE is translated into critical literacy as the ability to "become thoughtful, committed and active citizens" (Banks, 2003, p. 18).

With our eyes on the professional training of teachers in foreign language classrooms in Germany, we need to ask: How do Canadian educators approach the development of critical literacy? What can we as teacher educators and what can teachers-to-be learn from the Canadian context and what implications does this have for the curricular design of foreign language teacher programs in Germany?

In this contribution, we pursue these questions along the following steps: After clarifying the crucial concept of *critical literacy* and proposing a practical framework for critical literacy lessons, we present some insights into Canadian critical literacy educational practice. Based on these examples, we develop ideas on how the lessons learnt from Canada can be implemented in seminars for foreign language teachers with the aim in mind of teaching critical literacy at all stages of the educational system via these multiplicators.

2   Critical literacy – definition and characteristics

The theoretical basis of critical literacy is well-rooted in the Freirean critical pedagogy, which explores the need to freely address, question and fight against unequal power relations and societal oppression. The idea of "conscientização" (conscientization) specifically advocates educational practices which would first provide a better understanding of the world's power structures and then assist students in understanding their own position and in (re-)shaping society (Freire, 2003). This notion of questioning normative representations of the world and the given "general" truth can be further linked to Socratic pedagogy and maieutics, which established the need to systematically examine what one knows to uncover underlying thoughts, problems or interests (cf. Yoon, 2015).

Drawing from these and other linguistic, social, cultural, educational and political theories, critical literacy has developed greatly over the years and has ultimately transformed into classroom practices across the English-speaking world, in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States and South Africa. This development resulted in the establishment of specific definitions and characteristics, which further show its current relevance and importance.

One of the most frequently used definitions conceptualizes critical literacy as "the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life" (Luke, 2014, p. 21). Even though there is no "universal model" of critical literacy (Luke, 2014, p. 29), this definition and a variety of others focus on the term's sociopolitical orientation and transformative character in and out of the classroom.

Consequently, one of the fundamental characteristics of critical literacy is that it gives a political orientation to teaching and learning practices (Luke, 2014, p. 21). Societies have been characterized as being structured by unequal power relations (cf. Foucault, 1980, p. ix). Understanding and challenging those is essential to education in order to create a real-life oriented climate for the students (cf. Roberge, 2013, p. 1). To understand life situations happening around them, students must first understand and then question their – inherent – position in this world.

To do so, an establishment and sustainment of a critical literacy *milieu* (Stribling, 2014) is necessary – a pedagogical environment within which long-term change can be fostered. This way, critical literacy practices are seen as acts of renaming, reshaping and reconsidering attitudes as a lifelong process, and can therefore not be dealt with as "isolated learning incidents" (Vasquez, 2004, p. 2). This coherent and consecutive approach to learning – both for teachers and for students – defines critical literacy as a *continuum* pedagogy which flourishes in educational environments and not through single activities and is thus meant to be practiced and revised continually (Pandya & Ávila, 2014, p. 1). This idea of a continuum pedagogy – from university, across all school levels and back to university instruction – is a notion we consider highly relevant for democracy education in Germany.

3   A framework for planning critical literacy lessons in language classes

Part of continuously practicing critical literacy is the development of lesson frameworks which allow for teachers and students to strategically rethink and reevaluate their practices. These frameworks are mostly based on the core of critical literacy: problem posing and questioning. One of them is McLaughlin and DeVoodg's idea of a critical literacy lesson framework which includes four steps that help teachers both organize their lesson and work towards establishing a long-term milieu of critical literacy. The framework consists of a) engaging students' thinking, b) guiding students' thinking, c) extending

students' thinking, and d) reflecting (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004, p. 41). As this framework largely reflects the teaching practices found in Canadian educational settings (as will be shown below), we elaborate on it in more detail as a possible resource for organizing classrooms in the German setting. Furthermore, the four steps by McLaughlin and DeVoodg are specified for language classes and working with multimodal materials based on the findings presented below.

Starting with engaging their students, teachers are invited to pick a topic that is interesting and relevant to their students (usually connected to social justice issues) and enrich it with multimodal materials with which they will work throughout the sequence. It is important here to set a purpose for the sequence, related not only to the content (which topic will be introduced) but also to the language and material use (how the topic will be introduced) (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004, p. 41). In language classes, this entails specifically introducing the vocabulary (e.g. *oppression*, *struggle*, *anti-racism* etc.) through multimodal materials (texts, books, videos, images etc.).

Next, the teachers are asked to guide students' thinking by initiating discussions with questions that specifically challenge the materials: "who is in the text?", "who is missing?", "what message does the text seem to convey?" and others, which guide the students' thinking in identifying and analyzing the often biased perspectives of the materials (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004, p. 41). Hence, teachers work towards understanding and analyzing the narrative and looking past the literal meaning of the text to underlying notions of society.

After the students have looked for the different perspectives, the missing voices and the bias presented in the materials, the teachers are asked to help students extend their thinking and construct a new narrative by looking for personal connections and recreating alternative endings. Questions like "what similar experiences have you had?", "what would you do in this situation?" and "what would be an alternative ending to this story?" (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004, p. 64) are posed to help students and teachers connect the events with their own lives and realize their role in – first – unlearning and – then – reestablishing a new, more inclusive version of the materials. In language classes, this step works toward empathy and character-building for the students, whilst also underlining the teachers' role as co-learners, and letting go of contingent perceptions of them being the knowledge-keepers.

On this basis, the framework leads further to taking action to foster change: Students are asked to reflect on questions such as "how will/can we change our actions/position on this topic?", "what actions can we take based on what we learned?", and "how can we use this information to promote equity?". It is important to clarify that this final step is not only about revising what one has learned, but that it specifically addresses the actions that can be taken personally and collectively to promote social justice the way students can (e.g. "letting others know"; Louloudi, in preparation). In other words, reflection questions include planning action steps like "what could I do to change a rule, a procedure, or an attitude that is unjust? For example, could I write a letter or have a conversation?" (McLaughlin & DeVoodg, 2004, p. 65).

Accordingly, critical literacy practice frameworks usually put an emphasis not only on the questions to be asked, but also on how these questions and discussions can lead to actions and change of perspectives, procedures and attitudes. This step is similarly negotiated in other critical literacy frameworks, in which the final action in the process is "encouraging students to be socially and politically active on global and multicultural issues" (Yoon, 2015, p. 51). Yet another way to frame this last dimension is that of "praxis-reflection" by "taking action and promoting social justice" (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002, pp. 383–384).

4 Critical literacy in Canadian teaching practice[1] – the findings

How is critical literacy taught in Canadian teaching practice? The following data sample was taken during a research visit as part of a PhD project (Louloudi, in preparation), by employing a focused ethnographic case study design, conducting expert interviews with teachers and observing classroom practices. The observations were conducted in various Canadian educational institutions (university, primary school, middle/high school) in September/October 2018. All teachers participated in a literacy project in cooperation with the university. The focus of the project was also on the uses of (children's) literature as part of critical literacy practices, on account of which the observations were centered around the different literary choices teachers made.

In line with the idea of a continuum pedagogy for acquiring critical literacy, we trace the steps of the framework introduced above on every school level – at university, in primary (grade six in Canada) and high school (grade twelve). Due to having only limited space, we go into more depth at the university level as it is closer to questions of teacher education, but also provide shorter overviews (in tabular form and a brief summary) of the primary and high school level to emphasize the notion of the continuum.

4.1 University level

The university course observed is on critical theory, in which various sociopolitical theories (Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, new historicism etc.) are discussed with specific literary texts and, on this basis, how these texts can be used to decolonize the curriculum and the classroom. The university lecturer – Gaby – introduces a variety of materials (picture books, novels, videos etc.) to her teacher training students and highlights the steps they can take to build a critical literacy lesson.

4.1.1 Step one: Engaging – Introduction of social concepts and related lexis

Since the course is generally about critical theory, students have heard of these keywords before the observation and are familiar with the concepts. In this example – as well as in the other two – the understanding of social justice issues appears to be an end-in-itself, which also seems to be rather a common approach among the teachers.

> *Before starting the lesson, Gaby explains that for this class, as the students already know, there is an alternative option to the written assignment, which could be anything that will make her understand that they have gotten the point of the theory they are analyzing. To that, she gives an example of her times as a teacher: "I realized that writing is everywhere in our curriculum, but it is not the ultimate goal" she mentions. She then tells them that she had a student with severe cognitive challenges back in her years and writing was not an option for him – "We then came up with the idea of creating a chess game as an assignment, integrating the characters of The Hobbit, which we had just read." – this gave her the chance to see that ALL students have understood the power dynamics of the book and the characters, without making the students write an essay about it. "There is a great variety of alternative ways to help your students express what they know when writing isn't their strongest" she adds* (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada).

---

[1] Canada does not have a federal department or national system of education; depending on the province or territory, children might start school at the age of five or six and continue until they are between 16 and 18 (https://Canada.ca). Generally, children attend kindergarten voluntarily for one or two years at the age of four or five and all children continue to primary grade one at about six years of age (https://Studycanada.ca). The school system operates in three levels: primary (grades one to six), intermediate (grades seven to nine) and secondary (grades ten to twelve in most cases – even though some provinces and territories include the ninth class in the intermediate level). After secondary education, students can continue to university, college or Cégep studies. "Cégep is a French acronym for College of General and Vocational Education and is two years of general or three years of technical education between high school and university. The province of Québec has the Cégep system" (https://Studycanada.ca).

Gaby makes sure that her students understand that the *"ultimate goal"* of the assessment is that they can reflect on what has been discussed – the sociocritical concepts –, which then also becomes an example of how these teacher students will operate in their classroom. Gaby also elaborates on the underlying reason with an example – when reading *The Hobbit* with her students when she was a teacher, her emphasis was put on *"ALL students"* understanding *"the power dynamics"* of the book and not on the writing part. In other words, the focus of the respective lesson is the social issue presented and not the type of cognitive evaluation.

In this learning unit, the teacher combines two social theories – sociolinguistics and gender theory. Their interrelation is introduced through specific examples:

> *This lesson is bringing two topics together − sociolinguistics of English and gender theory. As Gaby explains to me before the seminar, she usually only introduces one theory per week, but this time she chose two − probably because she thinks one will add something to the other. [...] The introduction to English sociolinguistics is not only a categorization and description of facts, but it specifically focuses on deconstruction of popular opinions – or "norms". In the classroom, Gaby mentions, for instance, that sociolinguists have said that languages are products of social and cultural activities in which people engage and need to be viewed as an activity rather than a structure. "So, is there a standard of English now?" she asks – "It depends whom you ask" a student answers, and he continues "our curriculum says yes" – "Yes, exactly – the question is why do we speak. Consider the purpose"– "Communication, that is the main purpose" another student says –"Yes, and communication in which contexts? Is the language we use the language of the community, or academia? Or both? It depends on the purpose you have every time you want to communicate – there are different power structures: academia, political power, resistance, belonging [...] and what you use in all these situations is different. Using the language is having power in that situation"; and she goes on "Indigenous women used language as a form of resistance on their writing. This means speaking the enemies' tongue (the preferred English) in order to recreate power for resistance. This helped them create their own community and push back (the oppression)"* (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada).

Hence, the purpose of this first introduction is to establish a connection between language power dynamics (*"language is having power in that situation"*) and the way Indigenous women used it *"to recreate power for resistance"* (gender theory). In other words, this is not a simple introduction to the concepts of critical theory, but a demonstration of their interrelation and their respective connection to society.

4.1.2 Step two: Guiding – Understanding the oppressed side: analyzing and critiquing through questioning

Gaby continues with reading the picture book *The Southpaw* by Judith Viorst, which is a series of notes exchanged between two friends – a boy and a girl –, who get into an argument because the boy overlooks the girl's desire to enter the baseball team, because of her gender.

> *When she finishes the reading, she asks the students to name the stereotypes that are being supported and pushed in the book – with most of them answering about how girls don't play sports as well as boys and that they should probably be home knitting. A female student answers "We still see it as big news when girls play in a men's teams. Those stereotypes are completely reinforced." and gives an example of a Canadian female athlete playing in the men's team, since she is the only one and it is still, well, "big news".*
>
> *"So, why do we need a feminist lens in our lesson?" Gaby says and goes on to answer "to examine those ideologies, to explain how they are problematized or reinforced, to challenge the 'taken for granted assumptions' and recognize what the gendered patterns are." – "Take for example* The Great Gatsby *and think 'how do I problematize here and what am I questioning'" she says and she continues: "Think 'are there ways I read things differently because I see the world differently?' We have changed as a society and we need to be able to*

have these conversations with our students" and she gives an example of this change, indicating the 'me too' movement, which started on twitter and showing them an article on the Guardian about it (with the title "#metoo is not enough. Now women need to get ugly" by Barbara Kingsolver) (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada).

Gaby guides her students' thinking by specifically asking them *"to name the stereotypes supported and pushed in the story"*. Gaby also directly asks about the *"stereotypes"* and not what the story is about. By naming the stereotypes, students are invited to connect them to (their) reality – hence, it is not only about finding the biases in the text, but also about drawing connections to everyday life – *"it is still big news when girls play in a men's team"* in real life, too.

Moreover, drawing from a variety of multimodal materials – picture books, videos, classic literature, twitter, online articles –, students are called to take their bias analysis a step further to consider why this is relevant in their lesson: to understand the oppressed side, in this case, women. In other words, using a *"feminist lens"* to question materials can result in the deconstruction of *"taken for granted assumptions"* about gender, and to do so, students need to first reflect on and question their own world views, as Gaby mentions. Therefore, questioning is a gradual process: first, challenging the materials one is confronted with; then, using this to question one's personal world views; and lastly, uncovering society's biased and privileged views – from a micro, to a meso and then to a macro-level.

4.1.3 Step three: Extending – Connection to one's own experiences: giving individual voice to the students and handing over control as a teacher

Next, Gaby focuses on helping her teacher students realize and reflect on why the aforementioned steps are relevant for their classrooms. In other words, at this (university) level, this step – *extending students' thinking* – is not generally about giving individual voice to the students, but particularly about helping teachers become aware of their professional role in uncovering social justice issues in their classrooms and plan their prospective practices using these steps.

> *A female student reacts to her sayings and asks "But, can we say that society is wrong?" – "Well, the rise of racism was wrong. What you need to do is conceptualize where the flaws are and where we stand now as opposed to before"; "So, give me some reasons to introduce this to your class" Gaby asks the students. Many answers come such as "to give females a voice, to recognize discrimination, to give the males an understanding of another perspective and to change the way we view female characters in books and consequently in real life."* (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada)

To assist her students in unravelling their position and tasks as teachers – even when they are in doubt (*"but, can we say that society is wrong?"*) –, Gaby makes sure to give them direct steps: First, *"conceptualize where the flaws are"* and then second, compare this to *"where we stand now as opposed to before"*; that is, first break down the problematic – the stereotypes, the issues – and then highlight the societal progress happening with regard to this issue. To better direct them, Gaby promptly asks them to give their *"reasons to introduce this to [their] class"*, which revolve around the understanding of the oppressed side, but also the involvement of the privileged.

What is more, Gaby also underlines that part of their role as teachers is to oftentimes let go of their role as knowledge-keepers and lose control in order to better listen to their students:

> *[...] Gaby gives an example: "in Canada, we thought that Indigenous languages were only three, because only three of them were seen as valuable languages – this way we recreate misconceptions and prejudice" and she goes on to give an example of her own time as a teacher. "I made mistakes as a teacher too, because I lived in a world of 'right' and 'wrong'. When I lived and taught in the Arctic, we were a community of 400 people, all indigenous*

except me and my family probably. We were talking about plural [...] A student of mine then told me 'My dad shot a muscok yesterday' and I corrected him saying 'Hmm, you mean your dad shot a muskox' and he then corrected me saying that 'no, it was only one, not many'. At the moment, I thought he just didn't understand the singular-plural of ox/oxen, and it was until later that I realized that he completely understood singular/plural, he just thought that the word 'muskox' was written as 'muskoks', that's why he went on and deleted the last 's', because he just wanted to say that his dad only killed one. He had completely understood how the endings work for plural – we add an 's', right? But I didn't understand that. When we assume that people don't know, we make false assumptions about them. So, take time to understand what your students are saying what they are saying and why that is (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada).

Adding to what she has said before about first questioning one's own worldviews, she gives a practical example of what this means in pedagogical practices. Biased views and previous assumptions together with teacher-centered, "right or wrong" interpretations of a lesson, can lead to not only making *"false assumptions"* about one's own students, but also to a general environment of *"prejudice"*. Therefore, it seems that, for Gaby, letting go of a "right or wrong" view of the world as a teacher also means challenging one's own misconceptions to better understand their students.

4.1.4 Step four: Praxis-reflecting – Taking action against injustice

As a final step, Gaby reviews what has been learned and reflects on the whats and whys of gender theory in the classroom:

[...] Approaching the end of the lesson, Gaby mentions: "so teaching with a feminist lens means that we aim to change the way we view female characters, the way we view texts, the way we view men and the way we view the gender spectrum." And shows the last slide of her PPP, on which students can read "It is a political act that helps us change the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read" (from the slide). Gaby further comments on the slide: "it is important to stress that we don't mean to analyze the book only. What we do is find ways to change the world and give voice to our students." (University observation, 15.10.18, Canada)

As she mentions, teaching *"with a feminist lens"* is especially about "changing views" and "changing consciousness". The ultimate goal is to reestablish attitudes towards *"the gender spectrum"*. To highlight the transforming character of teaching, Gaby continues by saying that the process does not stop in analyzing *"the book"* – or in deconstructing the biases in it – but continues by taking action against the biases in order to *"change the world and give voice to our students"*. This understanding of teaching as an act of transformation relates to Yoon, who sees the implementation of critical literacy practices itself as "taking a form of social and political action" (Yoon, 2015, p. 51).

4.2 Primary level

The primary school class observation takes place in Betty's sixth class with eleven students participating. They have been in the middle of reading *Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper, hence, the observation revolves around the interactions based on the book.

Observation	Interpretation
Step one: Engaging – Introduction of social concepts and the needed vocabulary	
Betty has already written on the white-board what the program for today's lesson is: 1. Silent reading, 2. Similes and 3. Out of My Mind *(which is the book they have been reading for the past weeks). Today they will continue with chapter 14. About the book: Betty tells me that she doesn't consider that one to be directly one of the social justice books she uses, but it naturally brings up many issues of social content, like physical disability, bullying and communication problems. I remember that Kacy, whom I visited yesterday, also told me that she gives this book to her class twelve students – today I observe class six.* (Classroom observation, 12.10.18, Canada) *"So, what are the things we have been talking about – what is the book about?" she asks and lets the boy in front of her answer. "The book is about a girl who is physically challenged" says the boy with emphatic voice, "but JUST that – she remembers everything and she is veeery clever!"*	Social concept: Bullying (and discrimination) Material(s): book *Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper Engaging steps: a) introduction of vocabulary through the selection of book; b) use of the vocabulary by the students (*"physically challenged"*) and further review of it (*"BUT just that"*) not only in a linguistic sense, but also in relation to real-life circumstances of the characters (*"she remembers everything and she is veeery clever"*); c) social content not necessarily identified as an additional component, but a "natural" conversation; d) emphasis of the continuum → same book for class six and class twelve (focus on the topic and not the level of difficulty).
Step two: Guiding – Understanding the oppressed side: analyzing and critiquing through questioning	
"Is it a good place for her, where she is?" asks Betty and looks at all of them – "NOOOO" they scream all together – "How come?" asks Betty with a wondering face. A boy from the left interrupts her saying, "because everybody is meeeean to her" with an angry voice and face, "and they think", he continues with an ironic voice, "that she has 'special needs'" and he shows with his hands the quotation marks, emphasizing his irony. Betty looks at him with a smile at her face [...] (Classroom observation, 12.10.18, Canada).	Guiding steps: a) questioning: *"Is it a good place for her [...]?"* → the teacher guides students to consider the viewpoint and situation of the character and review it beyond the literal meaning → the teacher focuses the students' attention on the emotional and physical state of the character – not only on a personal level, but also in relation to the other characters, since the question focuses on the *"place"* where the character is, which makes the character's situation subject to her surroundings;

	b) → emotional (and not necessarily objective) (*"angry voice and face"*) critique, using the vocabulary (*"special needs"*) and taking it apart to question the intentions of her surroundings (*"they think"*); c) teacher's response (smile) → also "guiding".

Step three:
Extending – Connecting it to one's own experiences: giving individual voice to the students and handing over control as a teacher

"So, how same or different is she from you, what do you say?" "I THINK", a boy from across the class says loudly, "we are AAAAALL HUMANS!" and he points with his fingers to everybody – "YEEEES", everybody shouts – Betty interferes here asking them to explain their thinking – and the boy from the other side of the room says with a wondering face – like this is very obvious to him – "We are all the same kind – same species!" – Betty again says, ok, but she wants more details to that. Then, the girl who talked before, says with an empathetic voice, "Well, she wants friends more than anything – I want that too!" – "Yes", Brandon interrupts her, "and she wooorries about the others, like us". "AAAAAND and and", Kaley screams again, "she wants to be able to do all the 'normal things'" – showing the quotation marks with her hands – "like everybody" she adds. "You know what else" Brandon adds moving his finger back and forth in the teacher's direction, "she doesn't want to be teased" he says with a determined face, bringing his eyebrows together, "yes she doesn't – and I don't want that either" looking around and immediately adding "We don't get teased here, but I would feel the same way if we did". Then, Betty asks another boy who hasn't talked yet and he says that he agrees with Brandon, "she doesn't want to be bullied, she JUST wants to tell what is in her mind." Betty looks at the boy nodding yes and asks something about the activities they (the protagonist's teachers) have been giving her. The students reply again enthusiastically, with loud voices and many hands-gestures. Mary says "for sure, she	Extending steps: a) *"So, how same or different is she from you, what do you say?"* and *"more details"* → " driving them to give particular examples of their connection to the character; b) a student underlines that they *"don't get teased here"*, but had he been teased, he *"would feel the same way"* → Hence, it is not only about bringing students' own real-life experiences, desires and worries in, but also about reflecting on their prospective reactions in situations of social injustice, like *"bullying"*; c) *"it would wreck my day"* → it shows the teacher's position and puts her in an analogous role as her students – comparing herself to the protagonist and bringing her own feelings of discomfort into the lesson. In theory → also discussed by Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas, who propose that *a pedagogy of discomfort* allows for teachers and students "to move out of their comfort zones" and "recognize and problematize the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits routines, and unconscious complicity with hegemony" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 108).

doesn't like this ABC all the time" and *Kaley points at Mary with her finger and adds "YEES, she wants more challenges". "Hmm, more challenges", Betty repeats what Kaley said and asks "what if you had to do what she did at school all day?" – and Peter immediately interrupts her and says "HOOOW awful – really bad – four hours abc – that would be sooooo boring!" and rolls his eyes. "And how would YOU feel if a mean kid made you feel bad" – "SAAAAAD" some students answer loudly – "Well, it would wreck my day", Betty says and looks down a sad face* (Classroom observation, 12.10.18, Canada).	
Step four: Praxis-reflecting – Taking action against injustice	
Brandon reacts screaming "I would fight back!!" he says proudly – and then adds with a thinking face – "but she can't!" – and turns to his neighbor's ear, adding almost silently "I would help her!" […] (Classroom observation, 12.10.18, Canada).	Praxis-reflection steps: a) student's emotional reaction to the teacher's statement (*"would wreck her day"*) about him *"fighting back"* → comes as his own positioning against the unfair treatment the book's character is facing; b) *"but she can't"* and *"I would help her"* → the student does not only reflect on the problematic, but tries to find a point of action to directly address it – hence, he directly finds a way to act against injustice: support the disadvantaged side, in this case the heroine of the book, by helping her.

4.3 High school

The high school class observation – only briefly summarized here – takes place in Kacy's twelfth class with 25 students participating. When reflecting on her lesson after the observation, Kacy mentions that she would have done the lesson in a similar way with her middle school students which goes to highlight the idea of the continuum. The observed lesson engages the students' critical thinking based on a variety of materials – from the YouTube video *Countdown* by Prufrock Shadowrunner to the book read in class *Three Day Road* by Jospeh Boyden – which establish connections between First Nation People representation (in Canada) and the treatment of African-American and Black people (mostly in the US).

To guide her students, Kacy asks questions particularly about the *issues* mentioned in the materials and which real-life situations these might negotiate, to which the students answer eagerly naming a variety of relevant problematic events from the contemporary Canadian context. To extend their thinking, Kacy asks them to imagine a similar situation involving them personally and gives them space to reflect on their own experiences with racism; at this point, she lets her students dominate the discussion, taking a step back and allowing them to express their feelings of discomfort. Furthermore, Kacy makes sure to turn this into a bigger project of praxis-reflection; their opinions and ideas

will be developed to something bigger, for more people in the school to see and consider. In that sense, taking action against injustice does not only mean self-reflecting and deconstructing ideas in theory, but "letting others know in ways that one can" (Louloudi, in preparation).

5 Establishing critical literacy in German EFL teacher education in Bielefeld

What can be learned from these insights into Canadian education processes across different stages? What are, more specifically, implications for democracy education when educating future English teachers: Which current approaches in foreign language education are useful points of reference? Which aspects might have to be modified when transferred to the German context and which questions remain as to that process?

As pointed out in the beginning, we consider democracy education as an integral part of teaching languages and cultures. A current concept in foreign language debates that can be used as a reference point as it mirrors elements of critical literacy is that of fostering discourse participation ("fremdsprachige Diskursfähigkeit"; Hallet, 2008). It promotes the idea that students learn to participate in complex cultural discourses relevant across individual, national and global spheres by getting to know and learning to negotiate multiple texts and voices on a given topic. These texts are explicitly multimodal and include different genres as well as text forms, i.e., not only written or literary texts, but also audio-visual texts, non-fiction, social media, autobiographical texts etc. (Hallet, 2008). While the concept of discourse participation can be expanded upon based on the Canadian examples in terms of gearing it to promoting social justice, this explicit focus on various texts forms and the digital worlds seems essential to us: Since many of the texts are accessible digitally and students nowadays are exposed to a multitude of different texts in their everyday life, we consider that it is part of a critical democracy education to train how to navigate these digital worlds of discourse – including the different ideologies and social power structures expressed in them. We therefore think that critical cultural and critical digital literacy go hand in hand and need to be represented as such in teacher education.

We pursue exactly this aim in the project "Critical Cultural and Digital Literacy in English Language Teaching" funded by the programme "NRW curriculum 4.0", in which we are developing, applying and evaluating a course design at Bielefeld University to put these ideas into practice (cf. list below). Specifically, this course encourages teacher students to use digital tools for exploring, analyzing and reflecting on local and global cultures (both in analogue and digital spheres) in order to develop and apply sociocultural knowledge, 21st century skills such as collaboration and critical thinking (Fadel, Byalik & Trilling, 2015) and an open mindset considering digital and cultural changes. These experiences are continually reflected on from a foreign language teaching perspective in order to enable students to transform them into their future teaching scenarios.

From the Canadian examples discussed above, we distilled the following principles that can be useful for establishing critical thinking in teacher education in the context of this course:

(1) Life-long learning: The examples above illustrate that the development of critical literacy in Canada is not seen as a "special skill" only unlocked when students approach their A-levels. The Canadian curriculum rather makes a point in forming this skill already in younger learners at a level that corresponds to the first years of secondary school in Germany. Admittedly, this is a challenge in the foreign language classroom as opposed to the Canadian classrooms, in which English is the first language. However, especially if the students are encouraged to draw on various multimodal and multilingual means of expressions, this challenge does not constitute an

ultimate obstacle. The Canadian context also makes clear that developing critical literacy does not stop when students graduate from school; similarly, teacher students should develop this skill further in order to be able to inspire it in their future pupils.

(2) Taking action: The Canadian examples above culminate in a step in which students contemplate what they could do against injustice (and sometimes literally take action, e.g. by writing a letter). This resounds with Byram's early conceptions of intercultural competence, whose key component in Byram's terms is political education and a critical cultural awareness, or *savoir s'engager* – i.e. knowing how to take action (Byram, 1997, pp. 63–64). While Byram's concept of intercultural communicative competence heavily influences European and German curricula, it is this central aspect that is lost on its way through the institutional guidelines. In our course concept, teacher students should be sensitized to how they will be able to raise a critical cultural awareness and politically educate their future students in the sense of helping them to be able to take action. What is more, the teacher students themselves will be enabled to take action by developing hands-on teaching modules, thereby transforming their experiences into future classroom scenarios.

(3) The examples from Canadian classrooms also speak of a specific teacher-student relationship, which forms the basis of the critical discussion of sensitive topics and, arguably, is also the precondition for the teachers being able to withdraw from the discussion entirely or to participate as having one opinion among many. Above, we mentioned the necessity of supporting teacher students to develop a reflective mindset open towards digital and cultural changes. This mindset can be extended by an attitude of welcoming situations in which the classical expert-novice relation between teachers and students is reversed, namely when students are the experts on certain (digital) cultures and/or digital tools. Therefore, teaching critical literacy in the context of democracy education requires a democratization of the teacher-student relationships and a critical reflection on the still prevalent hierarchical understanding of these roles in teacher education.

(4) The very framework that can be traced in the Canadian examples can be implemented in the course concept: Students can be guided through the steps of a) engaging students' thinking, b) guiding students' thinking, c) extending students' thinking and d) (praxis-)reflecting in order to build critical digital and cultural literacy:

- *Engaging* the students' thinking means first introducing them to theoretical concepts relevant to democratic education (see above), while also demonstrating the importance of including sociopolitical themes in ELT through specific real-life examples of current affairs. The use of digital tools – both *method-* and *content-*based – is at the core of this seminar.

- In the seminar, *guiding* students through questioning and problem posing entails questions like "do I know about these issues?", "were these topics/theories part of my school education? Why yes, why no?" which aim to help students understand their position and views and deconstruct their own (possibly privileged) school practices. In this step, it is important to define and integrate multiple perspectives – students reflect on (marginalized) perspectives that are oftentimes sidelined and learn to take over the non-privileged viewpoints when talking about oppression and social justice.

- Students *extend* their thinking by connecting the materials to their own lives and practices. This includes reflecting on how materials can both reproduce and reinforce privileged perspectives and offer insights into oppressed ones in order to underline the necessity of both *de*-constructing and *re*-constructing given texts and media in classes. Lesson plans are presented on sociopolitical topics such as

gender representation and the #metoo movement, Black Lives Matter and the climate crisis depending on students' preference and specific interests.

- Students *"praxis-reflect"* by planning their own lessons in teams. The sense of the continuum is not only built through the use of the framework by both the lecturer for the course sessions and the teacher students for their teaching proposals, but also by the constant (weekly) feedback students give – the teacher builds the next session based on this feedback to ensure that the seminar works as a critical literacy milieu and not as a couple of isolated learning incidents.

Living this framework in the course entails that the students are professionalized not only through what they are taught, but also through how they are taught. Ideally, a practice lived in the course can be transferred to future classrooms.

6 Conclusion – and open questions

In this article, we have approached democracy education from a critical literacy angle. We have used data generated in Canadian school and university classrooms to show how critical literacy can be developed on the basis of a four-fold framework and as a life-long endeavor starting in early years. In a second step, we have sought to transfer the valuable lessons from Canadian classrooms to English teacher training based in Germany. In that process, we have highlighted the significance of the digital sphere for cultural learning and argued that critical cultural and digital literacy go hand in hand. Finally, we illustrated how key principles deduced from the Canadian context can enrich a course concept on "Critical Cultural and Digital Literacy in English Language Teaching", which is currently being developed at Bielefeld University.

Despite the potentials for transfer of "lessons learned from Canada", some open questions still remain. For example, a key guideline in German democracy education, the Beutelsbach consensus, states as one of its principles the prohibition of indoctrination: Teachers are not allowed to compel their students to specific political positions, but are supposed to make controversies transparent and allow students to take their own position as well as transform this into action (Wehling, 1977).

In connection with recent sociopolitical developments, however, it has been a matter of debate how neutral teachers should be when they are faced with extremist positions threatening the democratic order of the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK, 2018). In this debate, there seems to be a great ambiguity about what it means to not compel political positions: Sometimes the "neutrality" seems to lead to shrinking back from any political content and to allowing different opinions to the extent of (overly?) relativizing all of them. This reticence may go beyond a point at which breaches of human rights or rights guaranteed in the German constitution, structural inequalities or forms of discrimination like racism, sexism or homophobia (not to be confused with opinions) need to be addressed.

What we can learn from the Canadian context is to be less hesitant about setting the goals of democratic principles and to borrow from social justice education and their focus on practicing critical literacy as a means for the students to take action. However, a crucial point seems to us the question of *how* to reach these goals. The framework introduced and illustrated with classroom examples represents one way of pursuing them. It also left us with a few open questions which need further investigation and discussion in the context of teacher education – not only – in the foreign languages: Is it sufficient to just set social justice as the goal for every student in the classroom a priori? How can we avoid the risk of just producing socially desired answers in the classroom, possibly forgotten when leaving the school grounds? And, more generally: how to deal with the profound contradictions inherent in cultural learning (e.g. Volkmann, 2020)?

In other words: How can democratic principles not only be set as goals but also as principles of the teaching process itself? We expect that the key to democracy education

is not only in making this goal more explicit but also in finding methods which foster democratic learning in the learning process, including the contradictions and resistances of students so that they learn democratic action in negotiating different views (cf. contributions in König, Schädlich & Surkamp, 2021). Based on the Canadian examples, we are supported in the view that an open and less hierarchical teacher-student relation is conducive to that. And while the Canadian context has not yet provided us with conclusive answers to all questions, it has certainly inspired us to think of critical cultural and digital literacy education as a journey from early secondary school to teacher education and back – and to seek answers to our questions along the way.

Sources

Banks, J.A. (2003). Teaching Literacy for Social Justice and Global Citizenship. *Language Arts, 81* (1), 18–19.

Bell, L.A. (2007). Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education. In M. Adams, L.A. Bell & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (pp. 1–14). New York, NY: Routledge.

Boler, M., & Zembylas, M. (2003). Discomforting Truths: The Emotional Terrain of Understanding. In P.P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Pedagogies of Difference: Rethinking Education for Social Change* (pp. 107–130). London: Routledge.

Burke, A., Johnston, I., & Ward, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Challenging Stories: Canadian Literature for Social Justice in the Classroom.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence.* Clevedon et al.: Multilingual Matters.

Canadian Education Centre Network. (n.d.). *The Education System in Canada*. Date of access: 08.04.2021. Retrieved from https://www.studycanada.ca/english/education _system_canada.htm.

Fadel, C., Byalik, M., & Trilling, B. (2015). *Four-Dimensional Education. The Competences Learners Need to Succeed*. Boston, MA: Center for Curriculum Redesign.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977.* Brighton: The Harvester Press.

Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.

Gerlach, D. (Ed.). (2020). *Kritische Fremdsprachendidaktik. Grundlagen, Ziele, Beispiele*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto.

Government of Canada. (2020). *Education in Canada*. Date of access: 08.04.2021. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/ new-immigrants/new-life-canada/enrol-school.html.

Hallet, W. (2008). Diskursfähigkeit heute. Der Diskursbegriff in Piephos Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz und seine zeitgemäße Weiterentwicklung für die Fremdsprachendidaktik. In M. Legutke (Ed.), *Kommunikative Kompetenz als fremdsprachendidaktische Vision* (pp. 76–96). Tübingen: Narr.

KMK (Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland). (2018). *Demokratie als Ziel, Gegenstand und Praxis historisch-politischer Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule*. Date of access: 08.04.2021. Retrieved from https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlic hungen_beschluesse/2009/2009_03_06-Staerkung_Demokratieerziehung.pdf.

König, L., Schädlich, S., & Surkamp, C. (Eds.). (2021). *unterricht_kultur_theorie. Kulturelles Lernen im Fremdsprachenunterricht gemeinsam anders denken.* Stuttgart: Metzler.

Lewison, M., Flint, A., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on Critical Literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices. *Language Arts, 17* (5), 382–392.

Louloudi, E. (in preparation). *Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacies: An Ethnographic Comparison of Literacy Projects in Canada and in Europe* (working title).

Luke, A. (2014). Defining Critical Literacy. In J.Z. Pandya & J. Ávila (Eds.), *Moving Critical Literacies Forward: A New Look at Praxis Across Contexts* (pp. 20–31). New York, NY: Routledge.

McLaughlin, M., & DeVoodg, G. (2004). *Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students' Comprehension of Text.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English*. Date of access: 08.04.2021. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf.

Pandya, J., & Ávila, J. (2014). Making the Road by Talking: Moving Critical Literacies Forward. In J. Pandya, & J. Ávila (Eds.), *Moving Critical Literacies Forward: A New Look at Praxis Across Contexts* (pp. 1–16). New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203521861

Roberge, G. (2013). Promoting Critical Literacy across the Curriculum and Fostering Safer Learning Environments. *What Works? Research into Practice,* 1–4.

Stribling, S.M. (2014). Creating a Critical Literacy Milieu in a Kindergarten Classroom. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 10* (1), 45–64.

The New London Group. (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66* (1), 60–93. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.17370n67v22j160u

Vasquez, V.M. (2004). *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children.* New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410611109

Volkmann, L. (2020). Antinomies of Inter- and Transcultural Learning. *PraxisForschungLehrer*innenBildung – PFLB, 2* (4), 158–169. https://doi.org/10.4119/pflb-3532

Wehling, H.-G. (1977). Konsens à la Beutelsbach? Nachlese zu einem Expertengespräch. In S. Schiele & H. Schneider (Eds.), *Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung* (pp. 173–184). Stuttgart: Klett.

Yoon, B. (2015). *Critical Literacies: Global and Multicultural Perspectives.* New York, NY: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-943-1

Information on the article