International Journal of Human Rights Education

Volume 8 | Issue 1 Article 6

2024

Critical Language Education for Peace: On the Significance of Communicative Agency for Education for Human Rights, Peace, and Sustainable Development

Frauke Matz
University of Münster; Germany, frauke.matz@uni-muenster.de

Ricardo Römhild
University of Münster; Germany, ricardo.roemhild@uni-muenster.de

Recommended Citation

Matz, F., & Römhild, R. (2024). Critical Language Education for Peace: On the Significance of Communicative Agency for Education for Human Rights, Peace, and Sustainable Development. *International Journal of Human Rights Education, 8*(1). Retrieved from https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol8/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Human Rights Education by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

International Journal of Human Rights Education
Volume 8, 2024
https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre

Article

Critical Language Education for Peace: On the Significance of Communicative Agency for Education for Human Rights, Peace, and Sustainable Development

Frauke Matz* and Ricardo Römhild**
University of Münster; Germany

Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the intersection of human rights, children's rights, and peace education, and language education. Languages, communication, and dialogue play a crucial role in international understanding and cooperation towards human rights, children's rights, and peace.

This contribution recognizes communicative competence as inclusive of ideology-critical abilities (Delanoy, 2017) and begins by arguing that for students to become "agents of change and protagonists of their future" (UNESCO, 2024, p. 5), their communicative agency must be considered an essential aspect of transformative education. The discussion will focus on the field of English (as a "foreign," second or additional) language education, as English is one of the lingua francas used in global discourses on human and children's rights, peace, and sustainable development.

This paper will take a dialogue-based and interdisciplinary approach and will be developed in two steps: first, it explores how language education can provide a unique lens for educating on

* Frauke Matz is Professor of English Language Education at the University of Münster, Germany. Her research interests include cultural learning (especially in relation to human and children's rights as well as peace education), learning with different texts and genres (e.g., young adult literature, but also video games), and language teaching in the context of digitality. frauke.matz@uni-muenster.de

** Ricardo Römhild is an educator and researcher at the Chair of English Language Education at the University of Münster, Germany. His research primarily revolves around education for sustainability and global citizenship in the language classroom, cultural learning and critical literacy, as well as language variation and Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT). ricardo.roemhild@uni-muenster.de

human and child rights, peace, and social sustainability. Second, it explores the dimensions by which a critical approach to language education for peace can promote transformative communicative agency in the pursuit of social objectives. It will argue that through its focus on languages, cultures and literatures, the "foreign" language classroom is uniquely positioned to engage with the stories and people of the world; further, a critical language education for peace can empower learners to take communicative action for their own rights and to protect the rights of others.

Keywords: communicative agency, critical peace education, human rights education, language education, sustainability

Introduction

Critical peace education (CPE) has a long tradition as an interdisciplinary field (see, e.g., Bajaj, 2008; Reardon, 2021; Wintersteiner, 2022).[1] As it "utilizes teaching and learning not only to dismantle all forms of violence but also to create structures that build and sustain a just and equitable peace and world," (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016, p. 1), it is transformative in nature and closely connected to both human rights education (HRE), children's rights education (CRE) and education for sustainable development[2] (ESD).

In the recently published report *Revised recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms*, UNESCO (2024) emphasizes this connection, clearly illustrating that all these educational approaches can be viewed as an indivisible whole. It stresses that all member states should "support the development of contextualized curricula, for all subjects and topics" (UNESCO, 2024, p. 10), and explicitly mentions history,

[1] This contribution is firmly grounded in critical approaches to peace education and in an understanding of the concept of peace as outlined by Galtung (1969). While softer approaches, which focus on inner peace and emotional regulation, certainly have their merits, they do not aim for transformative agency and critical praxis as envisaged, for example, by the UNESCO's recommendations on education for peace and human rights (2024; for a more in-depth discussion see, e.g., Cook, 2008; Matz, 2023).

[2] In line with Misiaszek (e.g., 2018, p. 10) we recur to the use of lower-case letters for education for sustainable development throughout this chapter to indicate that capitalization signifies hegemony and top-down power relations, while the lower-case version signifies empowerment and bottom-up transformative praxis.

social sciences, and STEM subjects, but not second/additional or “foreign” languages. Regarding this recommendation, but also other contributions in the field of education for human and children's rights, peace, and sustainable development—both theoretical and practical—it is notable that the area of teaching and learning languages remains curiously absent [see, e.g., Bajaj (2008); Jerome & Starkey (2021)].[3]

Education is and continues to be political and we as educators must continuously raise the question of how we are "to teach young people to see and act on a global rather than local or regional stage" (Jackson, 2023, p. 22) within our respective disciplines. This is why this article begins by reformulating this question to ask: How can language educators teach young people to see and act communicatively on a global stage?

At first glance, it may not be immediately clear why 'foreign' language education should be included in addressing issues of peace, violence, human rights, and environmental justice. There certainly are several reasons for this, two of which are discussed in more detail below.

One the one hand, it may certainly lie in the perception of the field itself: for a long time and despite efforts from scholars such as Allen Luke [see, e.g., Luke & Dooley (2011)] or, on a more general level, Norman Fairclough [see, e.g., Fairclough (2010)] language learning and teaching has largely been conceptualised in functional[4] terms as simply acquiring linguistic communicative competence, despite its inherent "moral and even political dimension" (Starkey, 2023, p. 65). As scholars appropriately point out, this functional understanding of language education bears similarities to the Freirean idea of a banking model of education (Oxford et al., 2021, p. 57), with students developing functional communicative competences and linguistic

[3] The authors' background is in English as a 'foreign' language (EFL) education, more specifically the German context. However, this article's central arguments are generalisable and may apply to other 'foreign' language education contexts. To better reflect the multilateral process that language teaching and learning is, we use the term language education synonymously to EFL (also see footnote 9).

[4] 'Functional' here refers to both goals associated with traditional understandings of literacy education, i.e., being able to read and write, and to education models that are dominated by structuralist and discrete ideologies of literacy and learning practices that are decontextualized, highly reductive, and assumed to be universal.

awareness. A language, however, "is never 'just' a set of sounds, symbols or rules to be memorized with no connection to cultural context, real life, meaning, or actual communication" (Oxford et al., 2021, p. 57). Instead, language learning is inherently linked to socio-cultural learning and can encourage learners to appreciate and reflect on the social embeddedness and connectedness of their own experiences, while language use, and thus learning a language, is always also linked to identity construction (see Delanoy, 2023, p. 132). However, this needs to be reflected in curricular designs and frameworks such as, for example, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001, 2020) or national curricular frameworks. Interestingly, though, frameworks such as the CEFR have not adopted human rights approaches or peace education perspectives, nor do they reflect concepts of global or cosmopolitan citizenship in education [see, e.g., Matz (2020), Römhild et al. (2023)].

On the other hand, it might also lie in (the lack of) both theoretical and practical contributions the field of language education has made to CPE so far.[5] In the context of the English language classroom, for example, conceptualizations for a human rights-informed curriculum for peace education in language education remain scarce. Early attempts to promote such perspectives [see, e.g., Diehr (2007); Ghait & Shaaban (1994); Wintersteiner (2022)] have not been pursued on a wider scale [for a notable exception, see Mochizuki & Christodoulou (2017)], and while ESD as well as approaches such as global education and issues of social justice seem to be bearing fruit [see, e.g., Lütge (2015); Cates (2022); Lütge et al. (2022); Surkamp (2022); Bjerregaar Sørensen and Bolander (2023), Hoydis et al. (2023), Lønstrup Nielsen (2023); Römhild (2023a), Römhild et al. (2023), Burner and Porto (2024)], an explicit critical focus on CPE is still dependent on grassroots initiatives.[6] However, while contributions in the fields of HRE approaches to language education and, more specifically, CRE remain scarce, interest in language

[5] The reasons for this can only be speculated and there is a need for further research.

[6] The same is true for HRE, which remains a desideratum in the field of 'foreign' language education both in theory and practice.

education for peace seems to be growing [see, e.g., Matz (2023), Oxford et al. (2021); Tulgar (2017); Vasisopoulos et al. (2019); Yastibaş (2021)].

From our point of view, “foreign” language education is in a unique position to contribute to the social aims that form the core of HRE, CRE and CPE, as languages play a vital role in human communication, international understanding, and cooperation. Like the strive for human rights, pursuing peace and sustainable development is "a cosmopolitan project," and enables students to take part in this project, "to make links between their struggles and those of people in distant places, whom they have never met" (Osler & Starkey, 2010, p. 69); to do so, they need to communicate in one or more shared languages. Language education is meant to support learners in learning to listen, in making connections, and in responding in critically reflected ways; moreover, its aim is to enable learners to partake in (global) discourses which surround them in their everyday lives. This requires a change in perspective from the functional understanding of communicative competence as outlined above to a recognition of communicative competence as "inclusive of ideology-critical abilities" (Delanoy, 2017, p. 170). Language education informed by this understanding should aim "for a dialogue-friendly language use and power-critical language awareness" (Delanoy, 2017, p. 163).

This theoretical and conceptual contribution takes this aspect as a starting point and argues that if students are to become "agents of change and protagonists of their future" (UNESCO, 2024, p. 5), their communicative agency must also be considered as an essential aspect of transformative education. As a diverse range of global discourses regarding human and children's rights, peace and sustainable development are held in English, the discussion that follows particularly focuses on the field of English language education. Taking a dialogical and interdisciplinary approach, this article first explores the ways and dimensions in which language education can offer a unique perspective to education for human and children's rights, peace and, (social) sustainability. This discussion chiefly revolves around the cultivation of transformative communicative agency in the context of the pursuit of social aims in language education. The article also includes an investigation of the intersections between the fields of language education and HRE, CRE and

CPE as well as education for sustainability. Along this trajectory, the article also discusses a more holistic understanding of language education, one that is embedded in efforts for education for sustainability and peace, one that transcends banking models of education (Freire, 1970) and moves towards critical language education for social aims rather than for functionality. It thus follows a humanistic, rooted, and critical cosmopolitan notion of language education, to encourage learners to reflect on their own positionality in global contexts and discourses (Siepmann et al., 2023; Starkey, 2023).

Critical language education for transformative communicative agency

Language education should foreground students' "ability to find and raise one's voice in all matters" (Diehr, 2024), and it can contribute to providing young people with the communicative resources they need to develop their own agency. As language education is "not a single subject" (Tulgar, 2017, p. 72), it can include a myriad of topics and themes and therefore be shaped according to students interests and needs and respond to current societal changes and developments. Considering the present challenges, which "call for peace education to be broader and deeper, comprising even more diversity" (Reardon, 2021, p. viii), this certainly also encompasses issues of violence and peace, human rights, and sustainability. As part of the child advocate community, language educators thus also need to be constantly engaged in addressing these challenges, developing concepts and approaches to both protect and empower their students. In doing so, it is paramount to recognize that supporting children and young adults in developing communicative agency is an inherently humanistic and interdisciplinary task.

Critical competencies are part and parcel of this approach to language education and should be developed alongside communicative competencies "because young people should become able to use their knowledge and their languages to shape the world and to initiate important transformations" (Diehr, forthcoming; Marxl & Römhild, 2023). To conceptualize the fields of language learning and teaching and peace education together, it is helpful to turn to the concept of *transformative agency*. Although this concept has not

yet been more widely discussed in this context and has not been adopted by frameworks such as the “CEFR” (Council of Europe, 2020), reframing it for the field of “foreign” language education may help to develop concepts that encourage students' participatory engagement across languages and discourses.[7]

In envisaging an education for peace and human rights, Hantzopoulos and Bajaj (2021) stress "the importance and transformative potential in honoring the dignity of youth and offering them the ability to cultivate their own agency through critical analysis of power relations, collective civic engagement, and long-term strategic thinking for their future" (pp. 112-113). Transformative approaches such as theirs draw on "Freire's notions and cosmopolitan ideas of global citizenship" (Bajaj, 2017, p. 8) and thus, in its ideal form, they encourage learners to

- "*learn* about a larger imagined community where human rights offers a shared language,"
- "*question* a social or cultural practice that does not fit within the global framework," and
- “*identify* allies (teachers, peers, community activists, NGOs) to *amplify their voice*, along with other strategies for influencing positive social change” (Bajaj, 2017, p. 8).[8]

As agency is foregrounded in both HRE and CPE, this means students are not just encouraged to learn about *structural* and *cultural violence*, but to also be critical and analytical about these forms of *indirect violence* and—with help—act upon it (Galtung, 1969).

This transformative approach can be adapted for the language classroom with the overall goal of supporting students' communicative agency in a transformative sense. In line with Bajaj (2017), this requires rethinking

[7] There are some conceptualizations in the field of English as a 'foreign' language at a more general level (see, e.g., Luke & Dooley, 2011, Marxl & Römhild, 2023), as well as in the context of critical race theory (see, e.g., Crump, 2014) or CPE (Yastibaş, 2021), to name but a few, that can serve as starting points and also provide examples for classroom praxis.

[8] For a more in-depth discussion of this concept please see, Bajaj (2018) and Hantzopoulos & Bajaj (2021).

language education in terms of the three aspects outlined above, which, in the following section, are conceptualized as three dimensions in reverse order:

1) The Participatory dimension

Learning languages could be reframed with a particular perspective on participation and dialogue, which, again, is unique to language education. If learners are to be encouraged to speak out, to "amplify their voice" (Bajaj 2017, p. 8), to speak up for their own rights and the rights of others, to argue against forms of violence and for peace, then a different understanding of communicative competence is needed. Delanoy (2012; 2017) focuses on language learning in the sense of communicative competence as the learners' ability to respond. He stresses the importance of grasping one's own role within this world and that this "personal responsibility implies accountability for issues of translocal/global relevance" (Delanoy, 2012, p. 163). He recognizes that learners "as social beings need to articulate and negotiate their needs and interests in their decision-making processes, and that these responsibilities are connected to “response-abilities”, i.e., to communicative competences" (Delanoy, 2012, p. 163). Such a critical reframing of language education thus stresses the need to help students in becoming response-able, so that they are able to participate in a critically reflective way in shared discourses, to raise their voice and gain communicative agency across languages (Marxl & Römhild, 2023).

2) Cultural dimension

In terms of a *cultural dimension*, language learners should not only be able to perceive themselves as rights holders, who can engage with members of the larger imagined community using their shared languages, but also should also be encouraged to understand human and children's rights as a common language that they share. Whether and in how far learning and teaching languages can be conceptualized as critical language education for peace and sustainability thus "hinges on concepts of cultural diversity, hybridity, and plurality—all of which are central to language learning—but,

crucially, whether one is aware of one's own place within the net of global connections make all the difference" (Siepmann et al., 2023, p. 3). Thus, instead of viewing “foreign” language learning as “education in otherness,”[9] which appears to still be a prevailing underlying concept, it could be considered as “education in human dignity” (Matz, 2023).

3) Cognitive dimension

Language education is unique in that it not only uses languages as mediums of instruction and classroom discourse, but also focuses on them as the central subject of learning and critical inquiry. Thus, on a *cognitive dimension*, language learners could on the one hand, learn (to speak) about forms of indirect violence which are expressed through language and to identify them in the discourses in their own life-worlds. As language is also an object of enquiry, they could also be encouraged to deconstruct the mental categories which are transported through language (Diehr, 2007). This would support them in becoming aware of, analyze and question both structural and cultural violence both in their own communities and in more national, regional, and global contexts.

On the other hand, though, language education offers a "futures dimension" (Hicks, 2008, pp. 127-128). This might be less pronounced or missing altogether in other subjects, but it is inherent to language education. While education on a more general level "is rooted in what has gone on before, or knowledge that exists" (Gaudelli, 2023, p. 46), language education is often concerned with "visions of the future" (MSB, 2019). It can hence provide "a form of education which *promotes the knowledge, understanding and skills that are needed in order to think more critically and creatively about the future*" (Hicks, 2008, p. 127-128). Following and extending the line of thought presented thus far, the future might be one in which students engage in the

[9] Denominations matter. It is exactly this notion of 'education in otherness' which, in our eyes, is perpetuated by the term 'foreign' language education. This is why we refrain from using this term as much as possible, and only employ it sporadically and in inverted commas to help re-situate and re-contextualize this article in what is commonly known as 'foreign' language education.

process of "learning to live together," perceiving themselves as "interdependent beings" (Gaudelli, 2023, p. 39).

As an interim conclusion, then, rethinking learning languages as developing transformative communicative agency and "response-ability" can support language learners "in learning *about* peace-related discourses as well as in learning how to participate in those discourses to advocate *for* peace"(Matz, 2023, p. 190). To illustrate how this might be achieved in a curriculum geared towards the cultivation of transformative communicative agency in the context of human and children's rights and peace, the following section suggests a progression for critical language education.

From CRE and HRE to critical peace education: Designing a curriculum for critical language education

When envisaging a curriculum for critical language education for human rights, peace, and sustainability it is important to recognize that both children and adolescents are "are not objects of education, they are active participants in their own learning through collaboration with adults and peers" (Lyndon, 2021, p. 51). As such, the language classroom should not only be adaptable and responsive to the challenges faced by young learners, but also recognize "*children as citizens*" (Jerome & Starkey, 2021, p. 4). Children and young adults are global and cosmopolitan citizens and rights holders *now,* and need to be supported in perceiving themselves as such (Lundy & Brown, 2020).

As Yastibaş (2021) demonstrates in his study, this iterative process of language education for peace can begin at the primary level on the very basic competencies and skills of learning to talk about oneself, family, and friends, expressing likes and dislikes and treating each other in a respectful manner. Thus, early language learners can engage in a learning process *for* peace on a discursive level. They can explore these relevant word fields and lay the foundations for a language of peace as well as a language of advocacy (Mochizuki & Christodoulou, 2017; Römhild, 2023b). Furthermore, language learning always requires students to be curious and willing to engage in respectful dialogue; it requires "a language of peace," which language learners need to learn

to use if they "are to bring about peace" (Mochizuki & Christodoulou, 2017, p. 154).

On a conceptual level, learners can also be encouraged to progressively engage with their own rights as children and the rights of others by learning about, through, and for children's rights. In terms of materials, they can, for instance, engage with storybooks that deal with social and environmental justice, while gradually learning the necessary language. Thus, they can also get gradually involved in learning *about* peace on a conceptual and cultural level.

As students progress and become more fluent, the language of advocacy, as well as the language of peace and violence, can increasingly become an object of inquiry. For example, Tulgar (2017) suggests that students can engage with expressions of peace and violence in both their own and target languages, not only to develop the vocabulary and grammar necessary to speak about such aspects, but also to gradually engage in analytical and critical enquiry of the discourses relating to these topics. This illustrates the unique aspect of language education, as it is always a combination of learning *from* a language as well as learning *about* a language (Diehr & Matz, forthcoming).

At a more advanced level, teachers and learners can also directly address cultural violence which expressed through language, as well as indirect violence in relation to their cultural manifestations (Diehr, 2007). An understanding of positive peace in terms of human rights, and the ability to challenge hurtful language use, stereotypes and “othering” is essential to participate in these discourses. The principle of action orientation is a fundamental basis for language teaching and it provides unique conditions for transformative language learning based on the participatory, cultural and cognitive dimensions outlined above.

In sum, the language classroom can serve as a safe space for students to develop transformative communicative agency, to explore and practice language of and for peace and advocacy. Thus, a critical language education firmly grounded in the principles of HRE and CRE can encourage children and young adults to learn both for and about peace and is thus an essential

part of an education that aims to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (UN, 2014).

Twin goals: Language education for peace and sustainability

For successful, sustainable implementation of the principles discussed thus far, educational approaches in the language classroom need to move beyond the odd, isolated lesson unit on human rights and peace in a curriculum filled with other relevant topics. Instead, engagement with issues of human and children's rights and peace need to be further embedded in the larger context of educational efforts towards sustainability and global citizenship as, for instance, promoted by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2024). As such, this section zooms out, seeing critical language education for peace and sustainable development in the bigger picture, thus further substantiating its place among the educational disciplines that pursue social aims, rejecting a banking model of education that exclusively focuses on the development of functional-communicative competence.

The concept of language education for sustainable development aligns with this notion by offering a platform to thoroughly explore these inquiries in the language classroom. When discussing human and children's rights and peace education in the context of education for sustainability and global citizenship, it is helpful to remember that the "field of peace education is not new to the task of linking peace education to economic, social, and environmental education in a comprehensive approach" (Brantmeier, 2021, p. 110).

In terms of topicality, teaching and learning languages involves selecting current trajectories as thematic fields. It is safe to say that both the current climate emergency and violent conflicts will remain some of the greatest challenges in the future lives of our students. Therefore, in line with Bajaj and Chiu (2009), we hold that:

> Educators [in these fields] have a common goal of stopping violence, but in human communities there will always be conflicts, and humans must consume natural products. The challenge is to learn to resolve conflicts non-violently, to share limited resources equitably, and to live within the limits of sustainability. [...] Peace will require

> environmental sustainability and environmental sustainability will require peace. (p. 444)

This notion of mutual dependence and interrelatedness of social and environmental issues can be corroborated with two lines of thought, both of which help frame human and children's rights and peace as inherently linked to the social dimension of sustainability—and even beyond.

The first line of thought is summarized by Smith and Pangsapa (2008) and presented as a crucial premise for a discussion of obligations, responsibility, citizenship, and the environment in the introduction to their book *Environment and Citizenship* (2008). The authors state,

> Right from the start we want to emphasize the importance of recognizing that environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice—that there is no contradiction between addressing environmental issues and social inequalities. These are necessarily complementary issues, not contradictory ones. (p. 1)

Social inequalities, power imbalances, and injustices include questions of peace as well as human and children's rights. It is well known that environmental circumstances contribute to conflict and war, for instance in terms of droughts and the consequent scarcity of drinking water (UNFCCC, 2022). For instance, the civil wars in Sudan and Syria are often cited as prime examples for conflicts that have at least partly been fueled by environmental hardship and threat. Oftentimes, indirect pathways lead from environmental issues to a violation of peace. A UNFCCC report argues, "It makes the most vulnerable even more vulnerable" (UNFCCC, 2022). The fact that environmental issues and their consequences are directly linked to the outbreak of conflict and, in this context, human and children's rights violations have been discussed particularly in the context of the climate crisis (Knox, 2009; Levy & Patz, 2015; OHCHR, 2015).

The second line of thought expands Torres' suggestion that there is an "elective affinity between global citizenship and sustainability" (Torres, 2023, p. 21), resulting in peace and human and children's rights being referred to by Torres as "twin sisters" (Torres, 2023, p. 21) of education. According to

Torres (2023), the concept of elective affinity dates to Max Weber's *The protestant ethic*. While Weber does not define it, Löwy (2004) suggests that it denotes "a process through which two cultural forms [..] who [sic] have certain analogies, intimate kinships or meaning affinities, enter in a relationship of reciprocal attraction or influence, mutual selection, active convergence and mutual reinforcement" (p. 6). For instance, in the context of pedagogy of hope for social justice, Torres (2023) argues that "If we are in the century of sustainability and wish to achieve the seventeen global goals [UN's Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs], we must achieve the twin goals of sustainability and global citizenship" (p. 21).

To elaborate on this thought and link it to human and children's rights and peace education, it is helpful to consider SDG 4.7, which specifies what constitutes Quality Education in the 21st century:

> By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
> (United Nations, 2015, p. 19)

Through this goal, peace, human rights, global citizenship, and sustainability are inseparably linked. Thus, to fully achieve this goal, education needs to offer learning opportunities which help learners engage with all of these themes, topics, and philosophies.

From the perspective of language education, the appreciation of cultural diversity is a clear indicator that the field has a role to play here as well, since language education (in our understanding) is not only occupied with the acquisition of functional language skills but also offers unique opportunities for cultural learning. However, in addition, communication in global discourses is key to achieving any and all of these goals since learners need to be enabled to (communicatively) work towards transformation with others. Therefore, we would argue that we need to expand the family picture, as

it were, to include language education alongside the 'sisters' of GCE, ESD, H/CRE, and peace education.

Although language subjects are still missing from important policy guidelines (as was discussed in the introduction to this article), the idea that communication plays a vital role in GCE, ESD, H/CRE and peace education has recently taken root in policy guidelines, which also advocate for a more integrated view of these related fields, such as UNESCO's updated *Recommendations concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms* (UNESCO, 2024). An optimistic commentator might interpret it as a long-overdue milestone achievement, certainly from a language education perspective, that the role of communication and language is now at least implied. The milestone achievement might be found in the provision of a definition from one of the most central global players when it comes to education policy which includes hints at the importance of language in all of this. Referring to another UNESCO (2013) publication, the updated recommendations define Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as follows:

> GCED aims to equip learners with the following core competencies: a) A deep knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect; b) cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively, including adopting a multi-perspective approach that recognizes different dimension, perspectives and angles of issues; *c) non-cognitive skills including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, and communicative skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives;* and d) behavioral capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly, and to strive for collective good. (p. 4, italics added)

While this definition certainly invites scholars and practitioners in the field of language education to critical engagement and discussion (for instance, as has been proposed in this article, language education does not only involve the development of communicative competence but moves far beyond that), the inclusion of the vital role of language in building networks and thus collaboration for transformation is to be celebrated as an important

first step. Furthermore, by virtue of this definition being included or referenced in the recommendations on education peace and human rights, the link between language and the related fields of GCE, ESD, and H/CRE has been made extremely apparent (UNESCO, 2024).

The notion of language education for sustainable development or, to revert to the title of this article, language education for peace and sustainable development, highlights that the related fields are not merely to be considered topics in the language learning curriculum but that, in fact, language education can make unique contributions to the larger projects of peace, human and children's rights, global citizenship, and sustainability.

In terms of cultural learning, it has already been stressed in the context of SDG 4.7 that the language classroom lends itself to engagement with questions of cultural diversity. However, moving beyond the cultivation of empathy, openness, and tolerance and towards more hard-edged, critical learning objectives in the language classroom, Delanoy argues that:

> [the] link between responsibility and 'response-ability' makes communicative competence a major objective for all education. [...] Also, because of an increase in global interconnectedness those languages become particularly important which permit decision-making on transnational levels. Here, English is of particular relevance. Finally, the need to communicate in a dynamic and globally connected world entails forms of language education where the learners are given insight into the complexity of contemporary living conditions, and where language and thought are used creatively to meet situation-specific and changing demands. (Delanoy, 2017, p. 169)

This cultivation of a shared sense of responsibility in combination with the communicative ability to respond, to speak out against injustices and for the protection of the rights for all ("response-ability") is central to cultural learning in the language classroom. It requires learners and educators to consider themselves part of a larger, global community of rights-bearers. This type of language pedagogy transcends socially constructed, regional and cultural borders; it promotes culture-transcending ways of seeing and

being in the world and in discourses on peace, human and children's rights, and socio-environmental justice.

In the cognitive domain, the language classroom can become a space of learning about peace and human rights, thus contributing essential knowledge and skills for learners to become "response-able." It is particularly the so-called "foreign" language classroom, which, with its inherent outward focus, makes contexts and phenomena from across the world accessible to learners. With human and children's rights and peace being ubiquitous topics, the opportunities for contextualized learning are endless. However, it is paramount not to fall victim to a fallacy observed by Hahn (2020), who reports that schools in European countries tend to teach learners about human rights violations in other countries, often countries in the Global South, and do not offer opportunities for reflection of the human rights situation in their own countries. To avoid soft, potentially harmful approaches to H/CRE and peace education in the language classroom, it is important to also reflect on one's own positionality in the respective discourses and one's own role in the upholding and protection of rights and peace, including one's own community, region, or country.

In terms of its participatory dimension, the central goal of language education is mutually reinforcing with both the cultural and cognitive dimensions discussed above and the development of discourse literacy, that is an ability to actively participate in the (global) discourses of our times. This notion has been explored in the context of sustainability and continues to attract attention among scholars (Diehr, 2021; Diehr, 2022; Römhild, 2023a). In the context of critical and transformative language education for peace, the concept of discourse literacy brings an inherent action-orientation. Rather than reproducing functional knowledge (including vocabulary) on peace and human rights, the ability to participate in discourses requires the construction of one's own standpoint, the production of one's own language of peace—in other words, it requires and at the same time promotes communicative agency.

Conclusion

Reardon states that concepts of peace education should encourage educators "to teach *about* peace as well as to teach *for* peace" (Reardon 2000, p. 399). In our understanding, this includes active participation in discourses and, thus, represents a call—even a task—for language education to focus on the cultivation of transformative communicative agency. Language and communication play a vital role in efforts of education for human and children's rights, peace, and sustainability, but language education needs to open itself for the big social questions of our times to step up to the task and unfold its great potential.

The segue into the discussion was provided by an exploration of the inherent connection between the protection of human rights, peace, and sustainable development, reflecting the argument that "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development" (UN, 2015).

An educational philosophy that is both informed by and does justice to this premise is deeply rooted in human rights discourses, as it also entails supporting learners in defending their own rights and the rights of others. This has been discussed as an urgent and necessary task, as children and young adults "have an integral role to play in creating solutions to the challenges and crises we face. They are present and future innovators, leaders, climate activists and peacemakers. The future may be deeply uncertain, but it is theirs" (Russell, 2022, p. 3). So is the present.

The notion of transformative communicative agency centers students as active change agents in the present, encouraging them to explore, analyze, and reflect on the complex nature of communication in their everyday life. It is the role of educators to support them in navigating different forms of discourse. Conceptual frameworks that facilitate students' engagement in meaning-making practices and critical inquiry are therefore needed in language teaching.

Language education can help learners empower themselves to take communicative action for their own rights and to protect the rights of others, but it can only do so if CPE is recognized as a fundamental pedagogical

perspective. The “foreign” language classroom is uniquely positioned to engage with stories and people around the world through its unique focus on languages, cultures, and literatures. As such, it can also be embedded in transformative approaches, which—per Bajaj—aim at supporting students in learning "about a larger imagined moral community where human rights understandings offer a shared language," a language of peace (Bajaj, 2017, p. 8). This, however, can only ever work if the learners acknowledge themselves as active agents of change and "protagonists of their future" (UNESCO, 2024, p. 5), a future of human rights, peace, and sustainability.

However, the question posed in the beginning of this contribution remains too large to be answered in one article: *How can language educators teach young people to see and act communicatively on a global stage?* There is much more work to be done, not only in terms of HRE, CRE, and CPE, but also with regards to related fields, such as social justice, anti-racist, and decolonizing movements in “foreign” language education. What is needed is both more interdisciplinary dialogue between scholars and practitioners, more research, and more recommendations for praxis, accompanied by education policy change to better reflect the needs of our youth in this world.

References

Bajaj, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Encyclopedia of peace education*. Information Age Publishing.

Bajaj, M. (2017). Introduction. In: M. Bajaj (Ed.), *Human rights education. Theory, research, praxis* (pp. 1-18). Pennsylvania.

Bajaj, M. (2019). Conceptualizing transformative agency in education for peace, human rights, and social justice. *International Journal of Human Rights Education, 2*(1), 1–22. https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol2/iss1/13

Bajaj, M., & Chiu, B. (2009). Education for sustainable development as peace education. In: *Peace & Change*. 34 (4), 441-455.

Bajaj, M., & Hantzopoulos, M. (2016). Introduction: Theory, research, and praxis of peace education. In M. Bajaj & M. Hantzopoulos (Eds.), *Peace education. International perspective.* (pp. 1–16). Bloomsbury.

Bjerregaard Sørensen, L., & Bolander, L. (2023). Global *Dannelse* and French. In A. Schultz, & M. Blom (Eds.), *Global citizenship education in praxis. Pathways for schools (*pp. 107–115). Multilingual Matters.

Brantmeier, E.J. (2021). Towards a critical peace education for sustainability. In B. J. Lum (Ed.), *Peace education. Past, present and future* (pp. 109–125). Routledge.

Burner, T., & Porto, M. (2024). Exploring the relations between language education and human rights education. *Human Rights Education Review*, *7*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.5684

Cates, K. (2022). Global Education as a Cross-curricular Approach to Language Teaching for Democracy. In: *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 10(3), 75-96.

Cook, S. A. (2008). Give Peace a Change: The Diminution of Peace in Global Education in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 31(4), 889–914.

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion Volume*. Council of Europe Publications. https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4

Crump, A. (2014). Introducing LangCrit: Critical Language and Race Theory. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 11(3), 207-224, DOI: 10.1080/15427587.2014.936243

Delanoy, W. (2012). From 'inter' to 'trans'? Quo vadis cultural learning? In M. Eisenmann, & T. Summer (Eds.), *Basic issues in EFL teaching and learning* (pp. 157–167). Winter.

Delanoy, W. (2017). Building bridges: Towards a timely concept for culture- and language learning. In A. Onysko, E.-M. Graf, W. Delanoy, N. Dubric, & G. Sigott (Eds.), *The polyphony of English studies: A festschrift für Allan James* (pp. 163–176). Winter.

Delanoy, W. (2023). Quo vadis cultural learning and language education? In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 115–136). WVT.

Diehr, B. (2021). Warum Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung den Fremdsprachenunterricht braucht. In: E. Burwitz-Melzer, C. Riemer, & L. Schmelter (Eds.), *Entwicklung von Nachhaltigkeit beim Lehren und Lernen von Fremd- und Zweitsprachen. Arbeitspapiere der 41. Frühjahrskonferenz zur Erforschung des Fremdsprachenunterrichts* (pp. 32–42). Narr/Francke/Attempto.

Diehr, B. (2022). Nachhaltigkeitsdiskurse in der Fremdsprache verstehen, gestalten und reflektieren. In C. Surkamp (Ed.), *Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung im Englischunterricht: Grundlagen und Unterrichtsbeispiele* (pp. 41–59). Klett-Kallmeyer.

Diehr, B. (forthcoming 2024). Oracy in the primary EFL classroom: Theoretical considerations and insights from empirical studies. In J. Reckermann, P. Siepmann & F. Matz (Eds.) *Oracy in English language education. Insights from practice-oriented research*. Springer.

Diehr, B. & Matz, F. (forthcoming 2024). Peace education for young learners. Im Englischunterricht mit kleinen Schritten den langen Weg der Friedensbildung antreten. *Grundschule Englisch*, 89(4).

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191.

Gaudelli, W. (2023). Global citizenship education. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 37–50). WVT.

Ghaith, G., & Shaaban, K.A. (1994). Peace education in the ESL/SFL classroom: A Framework for Curriculum and Instruction. *TESL Reporter* 27(2), 55–62.

Hantzopoulos, M., & Bajaj, M. (2021). Human rights education – Foundation, frameworks, and future directions. In M. Hantzopoulos, & M. Bajaj (Eds.), *Educating for peace and human rights* (pp. 51–77). Bloomsbury Academic.

Hicks, D. (2008). Futures education. In M. Bajaj (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of peace education* (pp. 127–134). Information Age Publishing.

Hoydis, J., Bartosch, R., & Gurr, J. M. (2023). *Climate change literacy*. Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, L. (2023). Cosmopolitan education. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 21–36). WVT.

Jerome, L., & Starkey, H. (2021). *Children's rights education in diverse classrooms: Pedagogy, principles and practice*. Bloomsbury.

Knox, J. H. (2009). Linking human rights and climate change at the United Nations. *Harvard Environmental Law Review,* 33(2), 477–98.

Levy, B. S., & Patz, J. A. Climate change, human Rights, and social Justice. *Annals of Global Health,* 81(3), 310–322.

Lønstrup Nielsen, M. (2023). Hong Kong and the question of cultural identity – The English subject and global *Dannelse*. In A. Schultz, & M. Blom (Eds.), *Global citizenship education in praxis. Pathways for schools* (pp. 87–96). Multilingual Matters.

Lówy, M. (2004). The concept of elective affinity according to Max Weber. *Archives de sciences sociales des religion*, 127(3), 6.

Luke, A. & Dooley, K. (2011) Critical literary and second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Eds.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*: *Vol. 2* (pp. 856-867). Taylor and Francis.

Lundy L. & Brown, A. (2020). Revisiting the three Rs in order to realize children's educational rights: relationships, resources, and redress. In J Todres, & S.M. King (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of children's rights* (pp. 386-404). Oxford University Press.

Lütge, C. (Ed.). (2015). *Global education. Perspectives for English language teaching. Fremdsprachendidaktik in globaler Perspektive* (Vol. 4). LIT.

Lütge, C., Merse, T., & Rauschert, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Global citizenship in foreign language education: Concepts, practices, connections*. Routledge.

Lyndon, H. (2021). Listening to children. The rights of the child. In Z. Williams-Brown, & S. Mander (Eds.), *Childhood well-Being and resilience. Influences on educational outcomes* (pp. 46-56.). Routledge.

Marxl, A., & Römhild, R. (2023). Cosmopolitan minds, global discourses, and the significance of language education. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning – Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 81–98). WVT.

Matz, F. (2023). Peace education and the (foreign) language classroom. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.). *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 189–207). WVT.

Matz, F. (2020). Taking a stance: The role of critical literacies in learning with literature in a world at risk. In D. Gerlach (Ed.), *Kritische Fremdsprachendidaktik (pp. 53–67)*. Narr Francke Attempto.

Misiaszek, G. W. (2018). *Educating the Global Environmental Citizen. Understanding Ecopedagogy in Local and Global Contexts*. New York: Routledge.

[MSB] Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. (2019). *Kernlehrplan für die Sekundarstufe I Gymnasium in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Englisch*. https://www.schulentwicklung.nrw.de/lehrplaene/lehrplan/199/g9_e_klp_%203417_2019_06_23.pdf

Mochizuki, Y., & Christodoulou, E. (2017). *Textbooks for sustainable Development – A guide to embedding*. UNESCO MGIEP.

OHCHR. (2015). *Climate change is a human right*. Last modified March 27, 2015. United Nations. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ClimateChangeHumanRightsIssue.aspx

Osler, A., & Starkey, H. (2010). *Teachers and human rights education.* UCL.

Oxford, R. L., Oliviero, M. M., & Gregersen, T. (2021). Promoting peace in cultural and language studies. In N. L. Johnson (Ed.), *Humanities perspectives in peace education. Re-engaging the heart of peace studies* (pp. 55–78). IAP.

Reardon, Betty. 2000. Peace Education – Review and projection. In B. Moon, M. Ben-Peretz, & S. Brown (Eds.), *Routledge international companion to education* (pp. 397–425). Routledge.

Reardon, B. A. (2021). *Comprehensive peace education. Educating for global responsibility* (2021 ed.). Peace Knowledge Press.

Römhild, R. (2023a). *Global citizenship, ecomedia, and English language education*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44674-0

Römhild, R. (2023b). Learning languages of hope and advocacy – human rights perspectives in language education for sustainable development. *Human Rights Education Review* 6(1), 89-109. http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.5192

Römhild, R., Marxl, A., Matz, F., & Siepmann, P. (Eds.). (2023). *Rethinking cultural Learning – Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education.* WVT.

Siepmann, R., Römhild, R., Marxl, A., Becker, D., & Matz, F. (2023). (Re)Discovering cosmopolitanism for language education. An introduction. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 1–20). WVT.

Smith, M. J., & Pangsapa, P. (2008). *Environment and citizenship. Integrating justice, responsibility and civic engagement*. Zed Books Ltd. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350219946.0005

Starkey, H. (2023). Human rights education and language education. In R. Römhild, A. Marxl, F. Matz, & P. Siepmann (Eds.), *Rethinking cultural learning. Cosmopolitan perspectives on language education* (pp. 65–78). WVT.

Surkamp, C. (Ed.). (2022). *Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung im Englischunterricht: Grundlagen und Unterrichtsbeispiele*. Klett-Kallmeyer.

Torres, C. A. (2023). Global citizenship education and sustainability as real utopias. In D. Bourn, & M. Tarozzi (Eds.), *Pedagogy of hope for global social justice. Sustainable futures for people and the planet* (pp. 13–29). Bloomsbury.

Tulgar, A. (2017). Peace education in the foreign language classroom. *Journal of Education and Pra*ctice, 8, 72–77.

UN 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

UNESCO. (2013). *Outcome document of the technical consultation on global citizenship education*: Global citizenship education – An emerging perspective.UNESCO.http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002241/224115E.pdf

UNESCO. 2024. *Revised 1974 recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms*. UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/en/education/1974recommendation

UNFCCC. (2022, July). *Conflict and climate*. United Nations, climate change. https://unfccc.int/news/conflict-and-climate

Vasisopoulos, G., Romero, G., Farzi, R., Shekarian, M., & Fleming. D. (2019). The practicality and relevance of peace in an EFL teacher training program: Applications and Implications. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 16 (1), 10–29.

Wintersteiner, W. (2022). *Hätten wir das Wort, wir bräuchten die Waffen nicht. Erziehung für eine Kultur des Friedens* (2nd ed.). Studienverlag.

Yastibaş, A. (2021). Integrating peace education into English language teaching in primary schools. *International Online Journal of Primary Education*, 10(2), 308–318.