

How to Promote Socially and Emotionally Responsible Language Learning and Teaching in European Teacher Education

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Abstract

The "SOELE - Socially and Emotionally Responsible Language Education" collaborative project of two European universities aims to advance language education and teaching. It seeks to integrate thematic and structural innovations by developing a comprehensive framework centered on socially and emotionally responsible language education and by promoting Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) practices. This initiative not only seeks to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the social value of languages among students and educators but also strives to equip future language teachers with the skills necessary for fostering an equitable, socially and emotionally responsible educational environment. By addressing the challenges of social (in)justice in language education within the context of increasing educational internationalization and student mobility, the project contributes to the advancement of social responsibility and well-being in language education.

Keywords: *socially and emotionally responsible language education, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA), linguistic and cultural diversity, language inequalities, well-being, European teacher education.*

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, the “SOELE – Socially and Emotionally Responsible Language Education” project emerges as a beacon of change and progress. The project's primary aim is to challenge traditional language teaching, transforming it into a holistic learning environment that caters to the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of an increasingly diverse student population. This endeavor will be carried out in partnership between the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (Switzerland) and the University of Oslo (Norway), featuring international workshops, seminars, and publishing opportunities.

Recognizing the limitations of conventional educational models, the SOELE project seeks to foster a learning environment that is not only intellectually stimulating but also emotionally nurturing and socially conscious language education. The project ensures that all students, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or social backgrounds, have equal opportunities to succeed and thrive. This involves addressing issues of social justice in language education, particularly in the context of educational internationalization and student mobility. By promoting a deeper understanding of social justice and its implications, the project empowers students to critically engage with and challenge society.

The SOELE project underscores the importance of creating safe spaces and promoting well-being in language education. It advocates for the integration of theoretical frameworks such as critical cultural awareness, social justice, language decolonization and well-being into the curriculum. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a deep appreciation for diverse cultural identities and experiences.

By interweaving these approaches into the educational fabric, the project envisions classrooms as thriving systems where every student is seen, heard, and valued. This shift from traditional academic goals towards a more inclusive and equitable learning environment equips students with the necessary skills to flourish both academically, socially, and emotionally. It nurtures individuals who are ready to contribute positively to an increasingly diverse and dynamic society.

1.1. Theoretical Background

The SOELE project is committed to establishing learning environments that are inclusive, equitable, socially and emotionally responsible. To achieve this, the project integrates various theoretical frameworks such as critical cultural awareness (1), social justice (2), language decolonization (3), and the creation of safe spaces that promote psychological well-being (4). The aim is to develop learning spaces where students from diverse social, educational, and linguistic backgrounds can thrive and succeed.

1.1.1. Critical cultural awareness

Expanding upon the importance of critical cultural awareness, it is essential to create a learning environment that not only acknowledges but also actively embraces the diverse cultural backgrounds of all students. This approach entails more than simply recognizing differences; it requires educators to value and appreciate the unique cultural identities and experiences that each student brings to the classroom (Gay, 2018). By fostering a deep understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and connecting the curriculum to their lives and cultural contexts, teachers can create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach promotes a sense of belonging among students, acknowledges diversity, and helps to bridge the gap between home and school experiences.

1.1.2. Social justice

In addition to promoting critical cultural awareness, the concept of teaching social justice aims to address and dismantle systemic inequalities and oppression within the classroom and beyond. Social justice education is rooted in the principles of equity, fairness, and social change, seeking to confront various forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism (Bell, 2016). This approach encourages educators to engage students in critical discussions about social issues, raising their awareness of the challenges faced by marginalized groups and inspiring them to develop a sense of social responsibility.

Teaching social justice goes beyond merely discussing social issues; it provides students with opportunities to take action and connect their learning to real-world contexts. This empowers students to become active agents of change in their communities and the wider world, contributing to the creation of a more just and equitable society. By fostering a sense of agency and social responsibility among students, educators can help them recognize their potential to make a positive impact on the world.

Furthermore, social justice education challenges traditional power dynamics and hierarchies that perpetuate inequality and marginalization (Ayers et al., 2018). It promotes student voice, creating an environment where students feel empowered to express their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. This approach also emphasizes the importance of civic engagement, encouraging students to participate in their communities and contribute to positive social change. By fostering a culture of civic engagement and student empowerment, social justice education can help create a more inclusive and equitable society.

1.1.3. Language decolonization

Additionally, the SOELE project prioritizes language decolonization as a strategy to combat language disparities and promote sociolinguistic equity. Current sociolinguistic research indicates that language practices can either exacerbate social inequalities or stimulate social change (Rosa, 2020). Rosa's work underscores the necessity of an educational framework that proactively counters linguistic inequalities through 'linguistic disobedience,' a concept that corresponds with the SOELE project's commitment to all-encompassing language education. Linguistic disobedience denotes the active challenge and subversion of dominant language practices that relegate certain communities to the periphery. This can be realized through diverse methods, such as the endorsement of multilingualism, recognition of non-standard language forms, and the promotion of language practices that echo the cultural and linguistic plurality of speakers.

In the SOELE project, linguistic disobedience is an essential instrument for redressing language disparities and fostering inclusive language education. This can involve contesting the dominance of specific languages or dialects in educational contexts, inspiring students to

converse in their family languages, and weaving a range of language practices into the teaching content. Linguistic disobedience also encompasses raising consciousness about the political and social consequences of language use, which can facilitate a critical understanding of how language practices can either reinforce or contest social inequalities.

Inclusive language education seeks to disrupt ingrained linguistic hierarchies and champion linguistic diversity, incorporating indigenous and marginalized languages (Paris & Alim, 2017). This approach includes the use of culturally pertinent resources, collaboration with families and communities, and the advocacy of language rights in educational settings (Flores & Rosa, 2015). By appreciating students' linguistic repertoires and nurturing a more inclusive learning environment, educators can establish a space that acknowledges and benefits from the rich linguistic diversity of all students. One effective strategy for implementing linguistic diversity in language education is digital storytelling. This technique allows students to articulate their creativity, impart their cultural heritage, and contest assumptions while honing their language skills. Digital storytelling encourages an inclusive and captivating learning environment that values diversity and nurtures cross-cultural understanding (Rosen & Korte, 2012).

Tackling language inequalities necessitates the disassembly of language biases and the advancement of linguistic rights. Comprehensive shifts in educational policies and practices are required to guarantee equitable access to high-quality language education for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds. The selective valorization of linguistic diversity underscores the importance of inclusivity in language education. Scholars such as Duchêne (2009), Flubacher et al. (2018), and Urciuoli (2015) highlight the varying degrees of capital assigned to different languages in the workplace, indicating a broader societal pattern of language and speaker exclusion.

1.1.4. Safe space and well-being

In the realm of language education, establishing safe spaces is crucial for fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment that supports students' emotional, social, and linguistic development. Safe spaces enable learners to feel at ease while experimenting with new languages, making mistakes, and engaging in meaningful communication, all of which are inherent aspects of the learning process.

The term "safe space" refers to a physical or emotional environment where individuals can gather to share experiences in a protected and supportive atmosphere (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019). Historically, safe spaces aimed to protect marginalized groups from violence, threats, and hatred. In recent years, "safe-space policies" have gained significance at universities and schools to prevent discrimination, harassment, hate, and threats, fostering openness to diverse perspectives and opinions while establishing guidelines for fair idea exchange (Goldstein, 2005; Holley & Steiner, 2005).

Safe spaces in language education also pave the way for the exploration and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity. By nurturing an environment where students feel valued and respected, educators can inspire learners to share their cultural backgrounds, linguistic experiences, and personal narratives. This not only enhances the learning experience but also fosters cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

To strike a balance between establishing "safe spaces" and fostering critical thinking, teachers must be aware of the tension between comfort and assessment and ensure trustworthy relationships (Gayle et al. 2013; King, 2000). The foundation for a conducive classroom climate is sustainable and trustworthy student-teacher relationships, which require sustained attention throughout the course (Helm, 2009).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a structure for creating inclusive and engaging educational environments that cater to a wide range of learning styles and preferences, fostering equity and inclusion (CAST, 2018) and safe spaces within the classroom. UDL principles include presenting information in various formats, offering different avenues for students to demonstrate understanding, and creating engaging activities relevant to their interests and experiences. By incorporating UDL principles, educators can design flexible, adaptable, and accessible curricula and instruction for all students, irrespective of abilities, backgrounds, or learning preferences. This involves fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and respectful classroom culture that addresses students' emotional and psychological needs. Providing support and resources to help students manage stress, anxiety, and other challenges is also vital. By creating safe spaces that prioritize students' emotional, social, and linguistic development, educators can empower learners to engage confidently and authentically in the language education process.

In the neurobiological perspective provided by Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, intersubjective connections play a significant role in promoting feelings of safety, enhancing overall well-being, and ultimately improving educational achievements. Dana (2018) emphasizes the importance of establishing safe environments as a foundation for healing and development. By cultivating safe spaces, educators can foster a sense of belonging, encourage active engagement, and support academic and personal growth in students.

The Polyvagal Theory links the evolution of the mammalian autonomic nervous system to social behavior and underscores the importance of the physiological state in the expression of behavioral problems and psychiatric disorders. The theory identifies three distinct branches of the nervous system – the ventral vagal complex (VVC), the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), and the dorsal vagal complex (DVC) – which work together to regulate responses to safety, danger, and life threats. Three neural circuits regulate reactivity: Immobilization, Mobilization, and Social Communication/Social Engagement. Neuroception, a key concept from Polyvagal Theory, plays a crucial role in this process. It refers to the subconscious detection of safety or threats in the environment, which impacts physiological states and emotional responses,

influencing social engagement. In educational settings, applying Polyvagal Theory aims to enhance students' ability to engage healthily with their environments and relationships.

2. Methods

The SOELE project adopts a multifaceted approach to achieve its objectives, focusing on both thematic and structural innovations in language education. This section explores the methodological aspects of the project, providing a detailed account of the strategies and techniques employed to foster socially and emotionally responsible language education.

The project's primary objective is to drive the development of socially and emotionally responsible language education internationally, with a focus on fostering equal opportunities in language education and teaching. This objective is realized through two interconnected areas – thematic and structural. On a thematic level, the project is dedicated to generating and sharing knowledge on how languages, cultures, and socioeconomic inequalities intersect, thereby initiating a comprehensive dialogue on equal opportunities within the sphere of language education. Structurally, the goal is to create an innovative learning environment that bridges institutions, transcends linguistic boundaries, and fosters intercultural exchange, laying a foundation for a more inclusive approach to language education.

2.1. Aims of the Project

The project is structured around three main objectives: enhancing international collaboration and knowledge exchange among universities (1), developing a socially and emotionally responsible language education framework in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) courses (2), and examining the professional growth of future teachers within this newly established framework (3).

Firstly, the project enables collaboration between two European universities, the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (Switzerland) and the University of Oslo (Norway) that fosters internationalization in Swiss higher education and academic knowledge exchange.

Secondly, the project aims to develop a comprehensive framework for socially and emotionally responsible language education, providing educators with the tools and strategies necessary to promote social responsibility, critical cultural awareness among students, and well-being. In order to achieve this goal, we will apply Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) courses including Swiss and Norwegian students in the first implementation of the framework.

Thirdly, the project evaluates the experience of future teachers with the framework and the COIL course by applying mixed methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, and narrative protocols.

The project's ambitious endeavor reflects an emerging consensus in contemporary educational research, addressing both thematic and structural innovation within language education. This initiative corresponds to a wider trend in education that seeks to comprehend and incorporate the intricate interconnections between language, culture, physical and psychological well-being, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, it pioneers efforts to improve teacher professional development by implementing international co-teaching practices.

The project's thematic focus on the intersection of languages, cultures, well-being, and socioeconomic disparities is rooted in recent academic inquiries into the role of language in mediating social inclusion and exclusion. Research by Darvin and Norton (2015) delves into the concept of investment in language education, emphasizing the deep interconnection between learners' engagement with language education and their identities, social positions, and perceived returns on their investment. This framework underscores the importance of understanding the nexus of language and socioeconomic disparities for developing more effective and equitable language education practices.

In line with this, the project aims to execute the "Framework for Socially and Emotionally Responsible Language Education" via the "Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)" program. This involves students from the University of Teacher Education Lucerne and the University of Oslo in interactive learning experiences. Movetia-sponsored workshops in Lucerne and Oslo are conducted to bolster the project's goals, and research outcomes associated with the project are released to contribute to the academic community. An international symposium is coordinated as a concluding event to share the project's discoveries and underscore the significance of nurturing environments conducive to equitable language acquisition.

The integration of international co-teaching practices also speaks to the increasing recognition of the value of global competencies in education. A study by Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2011) underscores the importance of preparing teachers to navigate and teach in a globally interconnected world. Experiences of international collaboration and co-teaching can equip educators with the skills and perspectives necessary to meet the challenges of global education.

By situating its goals within these contemporary educational discussions, the project embodies a comprehensive response to the call for more equitable and effective language education practices.

Through its dual focus on thematic and structural innovation, the project not only aims to advance academic understanding of the complex dynamics at play in language education but also to enact tangible changes in the way language teaching is approached. This, in turn, contributes to the professional growth of educators and the development of a more inclusive and socially responsible educational landscape.

2.1.1. Thematic Innovation

This project is committed to addressing the intricate issue of social (in)justice in language education by fostering socially responsible language education within an international context. To tackle social injustices in language education, the notion of physical and psychological well-being, and the creation of safe spaces, it is crucial to critically examine the complex relationships between languages, cultures, and social disparities.

At the heart of this project lies the development of a deep understanding of the cultural milieu and power structures inherent in language teaching. Moreover, the project aims to empower current and future educators to cultivate critical cultural awareness and reflect on their roles in either perpetuating or challenging the social order through language education.

To support educators in this endeavor, the project team will create a framework for socially responsible language education and implement it in pre- and in-service teacher training programs through co-teaching (see structural innovation).

2.1.2. Structural Innovation

The internationalization strategy of the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (UTE Lucerne) is rooted in relational internationalization, emphasizing institutional and interpersonal relationships in knowledge production and exchange. In alignment with this approach, the project aims to introduce innovative teaching practices, specifically international co-teaching in collaboration with the University of Oslo (UiO).

Co-teaching offers numerous benefits for both students and teachers, with values such as equity, critical thinking, and partnership central to the co-teaching model. To underscore the importance of inclusivity, the co-teaching approach will incorporate translanguaging, which involves utilizing learners' complete linguistic repertoires for input and output in the classroom. Translanguaging also aims to encourage critical thinking, creativity, and cross-curricular learning.

In terms of structural innovation, the project's commitment to implementing international co-teaching practices represents a forward-thinking approach to teacher education. Co-teaching, especially in an international context, has been identified as a powerful method for professional development. It offers teachers the opportunity to collaborate, share pedagogical strategies, and reflect on their practice in a culturally diverse setting. According to Walsh and Mann (2019), such collaborative practices can lead to a deeper understanding of pedagogical principles and a more nuanced appreciation of cultural diversity in teaching and learning. This, in turn, can enhance teachers' ability to create inclusive classrooms that respect and celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity.

By situating its goals within these contemporary educational discussions, the project embodies a comprehensive response to the call for more equitable and effective language education practices. Through its dual focus on thematic and structural innovation, the project not only aims to advance academic understanding of the complex dynamics at play in language education but also to enact tangible changes in the way language teaching is approached. This, in turn, contributes to the professional growth of educators and the development of a more inclusive, socially and emotionally responsible language education.

2.2. Practical examples

In order to achieve these goals in the planned framework we introduce some examples of lesson series on the core content listed below:

Critical Cultural Awareness

Show a documentary film that explores the cultural diversity of a specific region or country and discuss the different cultural characteristics to learn to identify and challenge cultural stereotypes. Finally, create a language education game incorporating colloquial expressions and idioms from different cultures.

Social Justice

Develop a lesson plan that teaches students about systemic inequalities and their impact on society and create a role-playing activity where students can explore different perspectives on a social justice issue. At the end of the lesson series design a debate or discussion forum where students can discuss and analyze social justice issues. Afterward, students explore their biases and privileges in a reflective writing assignment.

Language Decolonization

Develop a lesson plan that teaches students about the history and impact of language colonization. students then research and present on indigenous languages and their revitalization efforts. Afterward an Input about linguistic diversity and language rights. students explore their language background and its impact on their identity in a reflective writing assignment.

Well-being – Polyvagal Theory in Language Expression

Begin with an introduction to polyvagal theory, specifically how it relates to voice modulation and the physiological aspects of speech in different emotional states. Illustrate with examples how a calm, connected state (ventral vagal) can improve language skills and expression. Proceed with a practical exercise where students engage in language activities that require them to identify and adjust their nervous system state using polyvagal theory principles, such as deep

breathing or mindful listening. This session aims to enhance students' language proficiency by fostering a physiological state conducive to clearer and more effective communication.

3. Results

A primary outcome of the project is the creation of a holistic framework for socially and emotionally responsible language education. The framework is rooted in the principles of critical cultural awareness, social justice, language decolonization, safe place and well-being, ensuring it addresses the intricate relationships between language, culture, and socioeconomic status in educational contexts.

Thematically, the framework consists of:

1. Critical cultural awareness: Understanding language's role in social inclusion/exclusion and addressing inequalities in teaching.
2. Culturally responsive teaching: Utilizing students' cultural backgrounds for an inclusive learning environment.
3. Translanguaging strategies: Leveraging diverse linguistic repertoires for creativity and cross-curricular learning.
4. Safe Space creation: Ensuring students' emotional and physical security for authentic expression.
5. Intersubjectively Sensitive Teaching (Polyvagal): Fostering secure connections for improved well-being and educational outcomes.

Structurally, the framework consists of:

1. Promoting and implementing international co-teaching practices: Collaborative teaching for professional development and cultural understanding.
2. Setting up workshops in Switzerland, Norway, and elsewhere.
3. Publishing research findings related to the project.
4. Organizing an international conference as a closing event to disseminate the project's findings.

Cultivating student agency and collaboration is another pivotal strategy for creating an inclusive and socially responsible classroom. Inspiring students to play an active role in their learning and to collaborate with their peers can promote engagement, critical thinking, and a sense of ownership over the learning process (Freire, 1970). By offering opportunities for student-led discussions, group projects, and collaborative problem-solving, teachers can establish a learning environment that values and respects the voices and perspectives of all students. This approach also aids in developing students' social and emotional skills, such as empathy, communication, and teamwork, which are vital for navigating a diverse and interconnected world.

The incorporation of technology in the classroom can also significantly contribute to promoting inclusivity, equity, and social responsibility. Furthermore, technology can facilitate differentiated instruction, enabling teachers to customize learning experiences to the unique needs and abilities of each student. This personalized approach can help ensure that all students have equal opportunities to engage with and benefit from the curriculum, irrespective of their background or learning style.

4. Discussion

The outcomes of this initiative have the potential to significantly contribute to the advancement of both cantonal and institutional objectives related to diversity, inclusion, and equity. Moreover, this project aligns with federal and international sustainable development goals, emphasizing the development of individuals' and institutions' capacity to take responsibility for the future through lifelong quality education.

The United Nations' "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" highlights the importance of quality education as a crucial factor in creating a more stable and sustainable world. In line with this, our project aims to ensure that future secondary school teachers in Switzerland acquire and implement 21st-century skills, such as creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, in their teaching. This commitment to fostering a more socially responsible education system will make a significant contribution to the establishment of educational equity in Switzerland and Norway.

Our project's thematic and structural innovations will occur within the context of international cooperation with experienced partners from the University of Oslo. International knowledge exchanges will be integrated into the pre- and in-service teacher training at the University of Teacher Education (UTE) Lucerne. This alignment with objective 6 of the common political objectives in training established between the Confederation and the cantons aims to anchor exchanges and mobility in education and training at all levels.

A notable innovation of this project is the introduction of social justice themes in language education for teacher trainees in Switzerland. This thematic innovation could serve as a model for other Swiss institutions. By training numerous prospective primary and secondary school language teachers in Central Switzerland on this subject, the project will contribute to a more socially equitable language education in the region. The project's impact will be further extended through recurrent in-service teacher training and the creation of an impulse group, ensuring the continuous development and promotion of socially and emotionally responsible language education.

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