

# Global Citizenship Education and English Learning through Picturebooks in Multilingual Settings

**Martina Irsara**


*Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy*  
martina.irsara@unibz.it

**Barbara Caprara**

*Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy*  
bcaprara@unibz.it

**Valentina Gobbett Bamber**

*Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy*  
vgobbettbamber@unibz.it

 © 2025 Martina Irsara, Valentina Gobbett Bamber, and Barbara Caprara  
<https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-293-523-8.3>

## Chapter Objectives

- Discussing the role of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in English Language Teaching (ELT) for Young Learners (YLS)
- Highlighting the value and importance of picturebooks as an effective tool in ELT for YLS
- Discussing the use of plurilingual strategies in ELT, fostering language development among YLS through multilingual approaches
- Exploring Montessori principles in the context of language education through the use of picturebooks
- Presenting and analysing a transnational experience in teacher education as a case study

## Introduction

This chapter argues for Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as a transformative approach to language learning and teaching to respond more effectively to current and emerging global challenges in an era of unprecedented change. A combination of GCED and the teaching of English as an international language has the potential to enhance language skills and also promote a deeper understanding of global interconnectedness and awareness. By embedding GCED within the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum for Young Learners (YLS), educators can facilitate the development of learners' sense of belonging to a wider global community, encouraging learners to engage with different perspectives and to cultivate empathy, essential qualities for responsible global citizenship.

An effective medium for achieving these educational goals is the inclusion of picturebooks in the ELT framework. Principled and well-informed choices of picturebooks, characterised by rich illustrations and compelling narratives, can act as a bridge between language acquisition and cultural exploration. They offer YLs the opportunity to engage with stories from various backgrounds, thereby facilitating discussions about global issues and developing critical thinking skills. In addition, the visual components of picturebooks significantly enhance comprehension, making them particularly valuable for YLs who are still in the process of language development.

The implementation of multilingual strategies in the ELT classroom further enriches the educational experience of YLs. By recognising and valuing pupils' diverse linguistic backgrounds, teachers not only enhance the acquisition of English language skills but also affirm students' identities and cultural heritages. A multilingual pedagogical approach is consistent with the principles of global citizenship by promoting respect for diversity and fostering a sense of solidarity within the classroom and beyond.

Following Montessori principles in the context of language education can encourage further pupil engagement. Montessori education emphasises hands-on, experiential learning, encouraging children to explore the world around them at their own pace. By using picturebooks as tools for discovery, educators can create rich, interactive learning experiences that foster curiosity about global issues. Montessori principles also emphasise the importance of fostering learner independence, which can empower YLs to take ownership of their learning and become proactive global citizens. However, Montessori's ideas need to be critically examined through a contemporary lens, recognising that her legacy has not been without its critics (Seichter, 2024). As a physician and biologist in the early 20th century, Montessori has been criticised for supporting eugenic and anthropological perspectives that offer limited space for diversity and inclusion. The challenge today is to thoughtfully adapt aspects of her educational approach while remaining attuned to the complex cultural and social dynamics that shape contemporary educational environments.

Addressing global issues in ELT for YLs, while recognising the importance of picturebooks, adopting multilingual strategies, and integrating Montessori principles, creates a holistic approach that not only enhances language skills but also fosters informed and caring global citizens who are prepared to engage with and contribute to an increasingly interconnected world. The following sections elaborate on these components, culminating in a discussion of a transnational teacher education experience in which pre-service teach-

ers collaborated online to develop ELT lesson plans that integrated picture-books and global issues.

## **Global Citizenship Education in ELT to YLs**

### ***Definitions and Aims of GCED***

*Global citizenship* is defined by UNESCO (2015) as ‘a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global’ (p. 14). Torres summarises the concept of global citizenship by emphasising that it is characterised by ‘an understanding of global interconnectedness and a commitment to the collective good’ (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14; Zadra et al., 2024).

Although the values associated with global citizenship have been at the core of UNESCO’s mission since its establishment in 1947, the term *Global Citizenship Education* (GCED) was coined in 2011 (UNESCO, 2024). In September 2012, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the *Global Education First Initiative*, which focuses on three key priorities: ensuring that every child has access to school, improving the quality of learning, and fostering global citizenship (United Nations, 2012).

While global citizenship encompasses a broad array of political, economic, and moral dimensions, the concepts of community and interconnectedness are consistently central to its definition. It is widely understood that global citizenship does not imply a legal status but rather signifies a sense of belonging to a larger global community and a recognition of shared humanity. However, this global perspective is not intended to diminish local identities or concerns. Instead, the local and global dimensions are deeply interconnected, influencing one another. Climate change serves as a prime example, illustrating how different regions are affected in unique ways, yet all share a common impact. Moreover, the personal and social dimensions are also interlinked. Emotional intelligence and self-awareness are essential life skills that foster empathy and conscientiousness. Recognising one’s own emotions is crucial for understanding others. Personal well-being and growth enable individuals to relate more effectively to other people. Personal experiences and stories that are shared in class can help learners connect with social issues that extend beyond the local context, helping them to recognise a shared humanity. Finally, the present and future are intrinsically connected. Responsible citizenship requires individuals to act with an awareness of possible future consequences of their actions.

The ultimate goal of GCED is to empower individuals to become global

citizens who are agents of change and actively contribute to a sustainable world and the well-being of all its inhabitants. Inspiring learners to act responsibly for the common good is a key aim of CGCE. However, it could also be argued that fostering positive attitudes towards global issues should take precedence over action with younger learners, as encouraging optimism is more urgent at this stage of development. Today, children are not only witnesses to, but often experience various global challenges, including environmental degradation such as deforestation, landslides, and floods; rapid social change that often leads to tensions and instability; democratic crises that trigger conflict and war; growing economic inequalities; and digital phenomena that bring with them a range of problems such as addiction, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy concerns, and more. Children are often aware of a wide range of global problems, and the weight of these issues can lead to anxiety, especially in more sensitive children. It can be argued that in today's world, hope and optimism are essential to nurture their natural curiosity and wonder, and to help them grow into adults with a confident, forward-looking mindset. When it comes to diversity, for example, it is not just about tolerating or respecting differences but about embracing and celebrating the positive aspects of diversity. People who appreciate and value diversity in its broadest sense are more likely to contribute actively to the well-being of a wider community.

### ***Thinking and Learning***

Thoughtful reflection is an essential skill for the recognition of common humanity and global interconnectedness. GCED aims to develop learners' understanding of complex and diverse global issues, where complexity and diversity are seen as enriching forces that provide opportunities for reflection and deeper learning. Successful or deeper learning means being able to move to higher levels of thinking. Although it could be argued that there is no clear hierarchy of thinking, the pioneering taxonomy proposed by Bloom and his associates in 1956 and its subsequent revisions encourage higher-order thinking in the classroom (Fisher, 2005). According to Bloom's cognitive taxonomy of educational objectives, lower levels of thinking involve *knowing*, *understanding* and *applying*, while higher levels involve *analysing*, *synthesising*, and *evaluating*. Rather than limiting teaching and learning to the application of rules and the recall of information, Bloom's taxonomy and later editions remind teachers to move to higher levels of metacognition by encouraging children to question, compare, contrast, examine, appraise, support, value, and investigate further. These higher-order cognitive practices

align well with the goals of GCED, which seeks to cultivate responsible and informed individuals.

Children's thinking, learning, and global citizenship skills can be developed through the teaching of specific subjects and the promotion of cross-curricular links. Interdisciplinarity is inherent in GCED, but the teaching of languages plays an important role, as language skills are essential to approach global issues from different perspectives and to promote international understanding (Lütge et al., 2023). The English language can be a window to the world, and a good example of how a language is not necessarily linked to a particular culture or community, but to the wider world with speakers of different accents and cultures.

The teaching of English as an international language needs to be constantly rethought in response to evolving trends in language, language learning, and language use. Communication seems to have become increasingly multimodal. Language is only one modality of making meaning, and learners need to learn to read or interpret texts of different kinds, including spoken, written, and visual. Pennycook (2018) emphasises that language learning does not just happen in our heads, arguing that it 'happens in and around a much wider set of semiotic assemblages including touch, smell, taste, things and places' (Pennycook, 2018, p. 131), and that we need to 'consider the social, spatial and embodied dimensions of language learning' (Pennycook, 2018, p. 131). Finally, ELT needs to be considered in the light of global developments. It can be argued that English as an international language cannot be taught without reference to global issues and that YLs of English need to be encouraged to see the bigger picture.

In practice, teachers can promote higher-order thinking and global citizenship through the use of effective questions and multimodal materials. The way teachers ask questions can have both immediate and lasting effects on children's learning. By asking questions that encourage reflection, analysis and enquiry, teachers encourage children to think critically – to take the time to look at situations from various perspectives. Finally, a story-based approach in ELT for YLs can go beyond improving children's understanding of English grammar and vocabulary and extend into cross-curricular areas, including multimodal communication and GCED. It has been shown that GCED is not confined to ELT at secondary level but can also be usefully integrated into foreign language learning at primary level, for example through the use of storytelling (Mastellotto, 2023; Koppel, 2025).

Stories and picturebooks can encourage children to reflect on their personal role within the community and relate their individual experiences to

the wider world. The value and role of picturebooks in ELT for YLs is discussed in the next section.

### **Reflection Point**

1. How do you interpret GCED and what do you see as its key aims?
2. How can teachers of English promote critical thinking and global citizenship skills in children?

## **Picturebooks in ELT with YLs in Multilingual Settings**

### ***Definitions and Value of Picturebooks***

A story-based approach has long been adopted in ELT, as it provides a variety of sensory and contextual opportunities to support language development, with oral storytelling and picturebooks playing complementary roles in teaching YLs. As regards the latter, the term adopted here is the compound *picturebook*, denoting a multimodal and experiential synergy comprising language, illustrations, and the book's design, as in the widely used definition: 'A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience [. . .]. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page' (Bader, 1976, p. 1). Here, the 'drama of the turning page' alludes to how carers and teachers can bring picturebooks to life in thrilling read-alouds with pre-literate children and YLs, and to how, later, learners can enjoy picturebooks autonomously congruently with Montessori principles.

In multilingual contexts, teachers aiming to raise their YLs' awareness of global themes can adopt appropriate picturebooks to create teacher-mediated experiences of encounters with numerous cultures, global themes, and diversity in their local contexts.

### ***Selection and Evaluation Criteria***

Selecting appropriate picturebooks impacts learners' engagement, comprehension, and language development. For teachers engaged in GCED with YLs in multilingual contexts the selection process can be informed by criteria which broadly focus on: teachers' personal aesthetic responses; an appraisal of the picturebook as an aesthetic artefact that can promote personal and collective growth and agency; the fit between picturebook and learners' characteristics and needs; and any emergent linguistic affordances (Ghosn, 2013). In evaluating picturebooks with GCED themes, the aim is to balance lin-

guistic, cultural, and pedagogical considerations (such as mediated interaction affordances and *narrative quality*) with the educational synergies arising from a picturebook's text, illustration, and design.

As regards teachers' aesthetic responses, initially teachers can read picturebooks aloud in order to experience holistically the interanimation of language and images. The selection process is then best structured through a range of criteria (Ellis & Brewster, 2014, p. 19; Mourão, 2023, pp. 191–196; see also <https://pepelt21.com>). The text in picturebooks – lexis, sentence structure, and complexity – needs to be challenging but manageable for YLs when mediated by the teacher. Additionally, learners' comprehension and participation in read-alouds are fostered by language features such as repetition, rhyme, and recurring patterns. The illustrations should be engaging and support comprehension by both complementing the text and sometimes contradicting it: this encourages children's critical thinking and awareness of alternative viewpoints. As regards cultural relevance and authenticity in themes and settings, considerations include whether picturebooks promote inclusivity, global awareness, and cross-cultural appreciation, while avoiding clichés and inaccuracies. Additionally, picturebooks' potential for interaction and their narrative quality also matter. Those that lend themselves to teacher-mediated participation when read aloud – through questions, group repetitions, embodiment – help learners actively engage. Age-appropriate, emotionally resonant, thrilling or humorous stories with appealing characters can motivate learners to explore themes and language further. A last question relates to whether picturebooks, after read-alouds, offer springboards for further activities such as role-playing, storytelling, creative writing, drama, and project work to further explore themes.

### ***Developing Teacher Talk: Read-Aloud and Oral Storytelling Competences and Stages***

After the selection process, teachers of YLs can bring appropriate picturebooks to life in the classroom through *picturebook mediation*. The term is used by Ellis and Mourão (2021) to refer to the scaffolding or support teachers provide when sharing picturebooks with children. This involves combining various competences to plan and manage inclusive and engaging storytime sessions. This process includes selection and preparation before the reading session, the expressive techniques used during the reading, and the reflection that follows, with creative teacher talk playing a key role in making picturebooks more understandable and engaging for learners. Bland (2015, 2022) defines *creative teacher talk* as a form of child-directed com-

munication that incorporates various strategies to support learning. Such strategies are interactive as well as multimodal and embodied, congruently with Pennycook's (2018) view of language: they include prosodic features of teachers' voices (intonation, stress, tempo, volume, and rhythm), gestures/movement, facial expressions, and the use of realia (physical objects or materials). Teachers' interactional competences enable teachers to engage all learners in scaffolded conversations. In their turn, picturebooks and oral stories, through their multimodal and embodied elements (activated by teachers' vocal and gestural mediation), also scaffold learners' understanding, motivation and participation. This entails that sometimes taken-for-granted features such as teachers' voices, prosody, and presence are essential, as they contribute to promoting learners' comprehension, inclusion and engagement in pedagogical-cultural events. Teachers' creative teacher talk also appears crucial in multilingual approaches which aim to promote children's higher order thinking through the complex interweaving of story-based approaches and GCED.

While picturebooks have largely been our focus, oral storytelling can provide a complementary approach and potentially engender hopeful educational synergies in the GCED multilingual classroom and ELT. Selected authentic oral storytelling repertoires offer multifaceted and motivating scaffolding to both teachers and learners through their memorable – typically tripartite – structures, repetitions, themes, contexts, clearly defined characters, and the simple dialogues, language patterns, and rhymes often found in stories (Bland, 2015, 2022; Gobbett Bamber, 2024; Pinter, 2006). In both read-alouds and oral storytelling, teachers draw on multimodality to speak/interact in a varied, embodied and expressive manner, with multilayered expressive gestures, movements, and facial expressions, thus aiding learners' comprehension and participation.

Teachers can structure story-based activities through interlinked stages to optimally scaffold the learners' exploration of GCED themes in multilingual contexts. Ghosn (2013) suggests that teachers frame a story-based activity as a repeated cycle or 'journey' comprising four stages: the first, pre-story, introduces key themes and language; the second entails reading aloud while ensuring interaction with learners through embodiment and multimodality; the third, post-story, further explores themes through teacher questions, plenary and small-group activities; lastly, story themes and language are repeatedly explored and expanded. Read's (2008) nine steps further scaffold learners' engagement through progressing from introducing learners to the picturebook/story, to creating embodied and creative opportunities

for holistic engagement, with the ultimate goal of helping learners explore themes/language in-depth and make them their own. The nine steps suggest that teachers can ‘arouse interest, attention and curiosity; make vocabulary memorable; engage with the story; facilitate initial comprehension; retell or act out; think from within the story; explore issues; transfer; internalise’ (Read, 2008, pp. 7–9). The last four steps draw on teachers’ questions and creative teacher talk to explore themes such as those linked with GCED while scaffolding the development of children’s higher order thinking in multilingual classrooms.

### ***Stories in Plurilingual and English Learning***

*Picturebook mediation* and *creative teacher talk* can be effectively integrated with translanguaging strategies in multilingual teaching approaches. Schools serve as a microcosm of our increasingly multilingual society, which includes not only migrants who speak a range of languages but also speakers of minority languages, especially in border regions. The coexistence of these diverse languages in one area is often referred to as *multilingualism*, while an individual’s developing competence in two or more languages is referred to as *plurilingualism* (Council of Europe, 2001). Classrooms frequently include plurilingual pupils, and disregarding their competences in multiple languages can be considered a form of exclusion. Multilingual classrooms should be recognised as the norm and learners’ plurilingualism should be acknowledged and valued. Viewed through a GCED lens, plurilingual teaching and learning in the classroom appear not only congruent but natural and fundamental. Moreover, plurilingual learning provides multiple learning affordances for young learners and is congruent with principles of inclusion. In multilingual contexts, a variety of strategies are used to scaffold learner understanding, motivation, and active participation.

One effective strategy is *translanguaging*, a term introduced by Baker (2001) to translate a Welsh concept used in Wales, particularly by the educationalist Cen Williams in 1994. Translanguaging refers to the deliberate, planned, and systematic use of multiple languages for teaching and learning purposes. Scholars such as Wei (2018) and Kirsch (2024) have argued that these multilingual practices support both teachers and learners in problem solving and knowledge construction, making them a natural fit with constructivist pedagogies that view individuals as active meaning makers.

Monolingual English picturebooks can be used in a beginner class by adopting a translanguaging approach. Teachers often aim for reading sessions to be interactive and to develop higher-order thinking skills. In the early

stages of English language learning, children can benefit from teachers' use of reformulations, expansions, and comments in additional languages to support their understanding of the story. As young English learners may struggle to express thoughts, answer open-ended questions, or ask questions in the target language, the thoughtful integration of multiple languages can help foster critical thinking and deeper engagement with the story. Moreover, various types of multilingual picturebooks can be used in educational settings to promote linguistic diversity and foster more inclusive practices in ELT. For example, interlingual picturebooks combine a dominant language with occasional words or phrases in other languages, while bilingual picturebooks feature the entire text in two languages (see <https://wordsandpictureslibrary.com>). Additionally, teachers can include silent or wordless picturebooks to encourage YLs to engage in high-quality dialogue, thoughtfully using multiple languages to enhance their understanding and communication.

Finally, separate versions of picturebooks in different languages, but with identical illustrations, are sometimes used in schools. This practice is common in South-Tyrolean schools that implement an *Integrated Linguistic Education* framework in a subject called *Languages*. This subject is generally co-taught by three language teachers, each using a different language, with each language represented by a distinct colour: English is blue, German is red, Italian is yellow, and Ladin is green. Teachers employ various multilingual strategies to enhance learners' cross-linguistic awareness, activate metacognitive language learning strategies, and facilitate language switching. Rather than focusing on contrastive linguistic features that may pose challenges, the emphasis is on identifying cross-linguistic similarities to strengthen positive transfer. Picturebooks play a key role in supporting this approach (Irsara, 2023).

### Reflection Point

1. How do you select picturebooks?
2. How do you prepare yourself as a teacher and how do you read picturebooks in class?
3. To what extent do you use plurilingual strategies in reading picturebooks to young learners and why?

### Montessori Approaches in ELT and GCED Using Picturebooks

In this section, we aim to explore the educational potential at the multidisciplinary intersection of ELT, GCED, and the pedagogical use of picturebooks,

drawing on Maria Montessori's principles. While providing a comprehensive theoretical overview of all the themes within this intersection is beyond our scope, we will focus on some overarching educational principles.

Maria Montessori's educational approach, developed in the early 20th century and now embraced worldwide, is founded on an unwavering trust in the child's ability to self-educate when placed in a scientifically prepared learning environment enriched with sensory materials and active experiences. In this setting, children select the materials they work with and determine the pace of their activity. Free choice and independent work, facilitated by the repeated use of sensory materials and practical life experiences, are fundamental pillars of a Montessori school. Montessori did not aim to establish a rigid educational model, but rather, through lived experience and observed outcomes, to develop a framework for nurturing the growth of the human personality. What is often referred to as the *Montessori method* should be understood as an open and adaptable approach, a support for life that extends beyond the confines of traditional education (Cossentino, 2005; Montessori, 1982).

To fully grasp Montessori's operational choices, it is essential to recognise the fundamental differences between children and adults in terms of learning pace, rhythm, and methods. YLs must be empowered to build knowledge and skills within a prepared environment, using scientific materials that align with their inner needs. Schools should therefore address children's psychological needs by prioritising materials that promote active, hands-on exploration, guiding them towards abstraction through sensory experience and fostering a sense of responsibility within the group. This requires an indirect approach to teaching in which a scientifically structured environment, enriched with specific materials, facilitates educational processes through movement, direct experience, and freedom of choice, while respecting individual preferences about what, where, and how to learn. Such an educational environment encourages children to select tasks to focus on and engage with, either independently or collaboratively in small peer groups, allowing their natural tendencies to emerge. Observers can then observe how children navigate the space, interact with others, choose activities, and allocate the time needed to complete them (Caprara, 2020).

A Montessori-inspired environment allows the adult to focus on observing the class group while creating an educational setting defined by movement, freedom of choice, collaborative work, and self-directed learning objectives. In addition to the numerous Montessori materials designed to initiate specific learning paths and promote autonomy in practical activities, the learn-

ing environment should provide indirect stimuli for reflection, such as picturebooks, images, and unique objects to observe and stimulate curiosity. In Montessori schools, the environment is the true teacher, as it is through its careful preparation that the educator makes the educational plan explicit. Consequently, the materials prepared for the child play a crucial role: in the attention with which they are arranged, the scientific accuracy with which they are designed, the self-correction they encourage, and the concise, precise language the teacher uses when introducing them.

Building on this conceptual foundation, we will explore the second element intertwined with Montessori's approach to education: language teaching. Montessori's work does not explicitly refer to a multilingual perspective on learning, nor does it establish a specific path for foreign language teaching, despite her extensive years of living and working abroad. However, in her writings, Montessori offers numerous reflections on the study of language as a key element of the human and social dimension and provides a thorough scientific analysis. For Montessori, language is not merely an individual phenomenon but is deeply connected to the social dimension of the human being. It is through language that people can relate to and understand each other (Consalvo, 2020). In the context of foreign languages, Montessori educators follow the general principles of the method, such as a prepared environment, sensory and self-correcting materials, and the child's independent work, while applying them to the content of language teaching. For a more in-depth exploration of this complex topic, we refer the reader to the text in the bibliography specifically dedicated to the Montessori approach in multilingual contexts. Maria Montessori's personal experiences, such as her travels to promote her educational ideas across Europe, the United States, and India, exposed her to cultures, languages, and religions different from those in which she had grown up, and fostered a deep respect for the world in its diversity. This sensitivity inspired both her and her son Mario to develop a variety of tools, including impressionistic charts, narratives, specialised materials, and methods for exploring the complexity of the cosmos through its history of evolution and change. These tools combined a simple yet scientifically accurate language, providing sensory experiences and interdisciplinary pathways.

In the light of what we have discussed so far, it is clear how important the daily use of versatile tools such as picturebooks is, alongside the more traditional Montessori materials. In Montessori's view, books serve as a bridge between children and the world; they are used daily to gather information, explore topics in-depth, and seek answers. The teacher's role is to consciously select and organise books, ensuring a thoughtful alignment between the

children's needs and the activities, readings, and images offered. These images are designed to support the child's understanding and serve as valuable tools for forming mental images of phenomena described in words (Consalvo, 2022). Illustrations can convey even complex concepts by using the child's imagination to provide a visual synthesis of what has been described verbally.

The principles behind Montessori's approach focus on the active child, who learns through movement, especially with their hands, in a non-competitive environment where each child learns at their own pace and based on their interests. For this reason, it is crucial to name things in relation to real objects, providing direct experiences; to encourage observation of the surrounding world by providing accurate terminology and encouraging children to discover details; to recognise the role of the environment in the educational process by fostering autonomy and decision-making skills; and to emphasise the importance of attention to detail, such as arranging books and images at the child's height so that they can be admired and explored. To carefully select the 'materials' we work with, whether objects, books, images, or a combination of these, we should pay attention to the care given to the details, ensuring that they reflect the truth, and to the messages they convey, in order to foster a mindset of peace and equity within the educational context (Caprara, 2022).

Care and scientific research certainly guided Maria Montessori in the design, preparation, and selection of materials to initiate the learning processes of countless children around the world, from which we can draw inspiration to make conscious and deliberate choices. The core idea behind the intersection of the Montessori approach, multilingual contexts, and GCED through picturebooks is to engage children's imaginations with stories, images, and activities that highlight the beauty of the cosmos and the powerful forces of nature, thus fostering creative thinking grounded in reality. As Montessori (2007) wrote, it is often forgotten that imagination is an active search for truth. The mind is not a passive entity; it is a consuming flame, never at rest and always alive.

## **Case Study: A Transnational Experience in Teacher Education**

### ***Description and Rationale of the Transnational Experience***

The principles and concepts discussed in the previous sections provided the theoretical foundation and informed the *Global Citizenship Education and Plurilingual Learning through Picturebooks* initial teacher education course taught in May 2024 as part of the Diversity in Action (DivA) project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This was an optional

10-hour course delivered in a hybrid format, in which Italian-speaking undergraduate students preparing to become kindergarten and primary school teachers participated both on-site at the faculty and in online collaborations with peers from Austria and Croatia, using Microsoft Teams.

Although students also met online outside of class hours, the course was primarily synchronous, with a blend of face-to-face and online supervision provided by academic professors and educators. The hybrid course enabled lecturer-mediated synchronous collaborations in small groups with participants from different countries and universities. Six sub-groups were created, with 4–6 students in each. The key educational objectives were for students to:

1. analyse the content and language of picturebooks from those listed and identify those that promote a GCED perspective for specific YLs,
2. select an appropriate picturebook, and design activities to foster global awareness and global competencies in YLs within the language classroom, and
3. collaborate with peers to develop effective read-aloud/storytelling techniques and language mediation strategies that enhance the accessibility of picturebooks and encourage learners' active participation in read-alouds and literacy-based activities.

A list of picturebooks was made available in the transnational teacher development course. The picturebooks were intended to supply variety for the course tasks: some address local/global issues explicitly, some recount true stories, while others embed GCED themes and values more implicitly. Course tasks included picturebook selection and read-aloud tasks, and formative assessment projects entailing the planning and presenting by each sub-group of a short story-based lesson plan for specific YLs. Course participants read aloud, evaluated (with lecturer mediation) and selected five picturebooks according to the criteria briefly described above. Two groups chose the same picturebook. Students selected picturebooks that can give rise to reflections on: emotional intelligence, friendship, care (*Wolf and Bear*, Rolfe, 2023); multifaceted aspects of humanity's relationship with and curiosity about the natural world (*This Moose Belongs To Me*, Jeffers, 2012; *Look Up!* Bryon, 2019). Students were also drawn to picturebooks that prominently featured important themes, such as the right to education for all as enacted vocation (*Malala's Magic Pencil*, Yousafzai, 2017), and child/family poverty (*It's a No Money Day*, Milner, 2019). The latter picturebook features a child narrating

a text in the first person; the child's naïve viewpoint is complemented, contradicted, and expanded by sensitive illustrations which reveal the mother's concerned care.

As part of their formative assessment projects, students in small transnational groups created pedagogical activities for specific YLs stemming from their chosen picturebooks. They structured such activities on the basis of the storytelling steps and stages outlined above. Through their choices, accompanying activities, and sensitive read-alouds in groups, all participating students fulfilled the core assessment criteria which called for active collaborative participation in transnational groups. Criteria which addressed crucial child-directed teacher talk competences were termed as in-progress because of the brevity of the course and its somewhat distancing online modalities. Happily, participants (particularly those in groups facing fewer technical challenges) demonstrated a clear understanding as well as enjoyment of their scaffolding valency. Those criteria included the ability to produce YL-appropriate teacher talk with a focus on cognitive, affective, embodied, interactive and linguistic strategies.

The teacher development experience arose through an awareness that transnational communities of learning can be transformative. Multilingual educational programmes – hospitable to GCED values – can foster equitable, peaceful, tolerant and environmentally sustainable futures, as advocated by UNESCO (2014).

Given its brevity, the course's overarching focus comprised multiple interlinked aims in terms of GCED, teacher values and interactive mediation competences which may bring read-alouds and related activities to life for YLs. Embodied multimodal competences and critical thinking are needed to communicate themes and values to learners with sincerity and presence. Arguably, such teacher education aims need to be coherently aligned as well as collaboratively enacted and experienced in safe and supportive environments. This appears especially important as teachers' ability to confidently offer appropriate cognitive, affective, embodied and linguistic scaffolding strongly impacts overall short- and long-term learner outcomes. Accordingly, the 'Head-Heart-Hands' embodied learning approach and ethos were chosen as an overarching framework for delivering the blended learning course (Gazibara, 2013).

### Reflection Point

1. What do you think could be the main challenges when collaborating online with people from other countries?

2. What do you think could be the main benefits of collaborating online with people from other countries?
3. Which modalities would you opt for when collaborating with people from other countries?

### ***Experience Evaluation and Implications for Teacher Education with a Focus on Global Citizenship***

The short *Global Citizenship Education and Plurilingual Learning through Picturebooks* initial teacher education course is briefly evaluated here in the light of formal evaluations by those students participating in-person from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and of anecdotal reports by students and lecturers alike. The formal evaluations were highly positive as regards all pre-established criteria relating to aspects of: the course, lectureship, students' interest, and infrastructure. To exemplify, as regards lectureship there was great appreciation of the lecturers' openness to questions and availability for explanations and clarifications – something which had been explicitly planned, congruently with the course values and aims.

Students also provided written open-ended comments. These included reflections on linguistic aspects: 'I really liked this course, and it improved my English skills;' 'The teaching and language was really good and comprehensible.' Anecdotally, students reported they enjoyed speaking English as an international language for authentic communication purposes, which was difficult but interesting. As regards reading picturebooks aloud, some written comments revealed a wish for more time for such activities during the brief course: 'I would have done more practice on the reading and the modality of reading.' In this regard, anecdotal reports from the course lecturers also indicate that participants very much enjoyed carrying out read-alouds in pairs and small groups in the synchronous hybrid settings provided. Additionally, as regards the online/hybrid course modalities, one student wrote: 'it would be nice to do the same activities in a three-day-intensive course in presence, with all the students from the different universities.'

One partial exception in the students' appreciation relates to initially challenging technical aspects of the transnational course. Although participants eventually managed to collaborate online, initially the Microsoft Teams platform led to connectivity and other issues for those students participating not as 'internal' (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano) Microsoft Teams users, but as 'guest' users, that is students from other universities. To exemplify, video and/or sound connections in Microsoft Teams meetings were at times unstable (with such issues compounded by individual students' issues with their

own equipment, such as laptop microphones) and required time to be optimised – time that was therefore not devoted to teacher education activities. As regards the sharing of documents produced as part of group-work, ‘internal’ Teams users were able to do this fast and efficiently through Teams; this was not possible for external or ‘guest’ users, leading to the less smooth use of alternative modalities.

The complexity of the educational aims underpinning the European DivA project arguably demand both research which may explore suitable approaches to teacher education and training in a variety of global contexts, and classroom-based research, likewise in differing instructional contexts. A lack of fine-grained research on how teachers deploy interactional strategies which may support read-aloud practices in the language classroom has been highlighted by Mourão (2023). Given the importance attributed to creative teacher talk and child-directed modified speech in ELT and in such multifaceted educational approaches with young language learners, future research can beneficially focus on longitudinally investigating manifold aspects of authentic classroom interactions, with specific regard to those entailing the adoption of picturebooks to support YLs’ developing awareness of GCED themes and values in multilingual instructed contexts. Further areas arguably in need of investigation relate to teacher education and training programmes to prepare teachers for integrating GCED and holistic approaches in ELT and multilingual environments, as well as to the multifaceted roles of teacher educators. Children’s responses to picturebook-related and/or GCED activities and tasks are a further area of interest. This is as YLs’ reactions may vary, and sometimes be challenging or demonstrate an ‘empathetic disconnect’ (Valente, 2022, p. 261) – knee-jerk rejections of teacher-suggested themes perhaps caused by linguistic and/or cultural distance, perceived inaccuracies and stereotypes, or even by (intergenerational) traumas. Arguably, negative reactions need dealing with expertly and sympathetically rather than with reprobation. When teachers – sustained by teacher educators who are themselves adept at scaffolding others’ development, by transformational story-based pedagogical activities, and by coherent programmes – can congruently voice and embody hope, enthusiasm, and inclusion, such efforts may powerfully affect children’s mindsets and therefore actions. The power of story and children’s literature lies in their being transformational.

### **Conclusions and Future Prospects**

This chapter has explored issues pertaining to GCED with YLs, including the rationale for adopting picturebooks in language education, the reasons for

integrating GCED aims and values into plurilingual interventions through picturebooks, and the application of Montessori principles in the context of teaching language and GCED to children.

The chapter has emphasised that global citizenship relates to feeling connected to a larger global community and understanding the interconnectedness of local, national, and global issues. GCED is about caring for the common good and our shared humanity, while valuing local identities and all languages. English itself, as an international language, plays a key bridging role in promoting international awareness, transcending national borders and connecting diverse communities, potentially helping individuals become global citizens who contribute to a sustainable and peaceful world. GCED focuses on recognising global challenges such as climate change and inequality, while also promoting personal well-being. For children, the aim is to inspire optimism and curiosity, particularly in the face of global issues such as environmental degradation, conflict, and problems arising from digitalisation. Promoting positive attitudes and embracing diversity are essential for building a more inclusive and compassionate world. Thoughtful reflection is central to GCED: it encourages learners to engage with diversity as an enriching learning opportunity. Therefore, GCED invites learners to assess personal attitudes and local values within a broader context, fostering hope, respect, and critical thinking.

The integration of GCED in schools, and therefore also in (language) teacher initial education and continuing professional development, is congruent with the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and linked Sustainable Development Goals. In multilingual and English-as-an-international-language contexts, we seek to equip children with the skills to communicate and collaborate across cultures. Compelling narratives can create holistic development affordances to shape global futures; this is as narratives enable us to struggle and rejoice *in* the book or story, through characters rooted in their diverse worlds yet with their struggles and joys resonating in ours. Relevant mediating language teacher competences entailing multimodality and embodiment have been highlighted in this chapter, together with criteria for selecting picturebooks, and steps for structuring young learner-appropriate teaching units. Among other aspects, it has been emphasised that translanguaging practices can help learners appreciate stories and support their critical thinking, and are in line with principles of inclusion.

Furthermore, the chapter has argued that Montessori principles can be compatible with those underpinning GCED, supporting the use of picturebooks as affordances in learning environments and as imaginative treasure

troves in children's teacher-mediated, as well as increasingly independent and autonomous, 'active search for truth.'

Finally, a transnational experience in teacher education has been analysed, highlighting its potential implications for educational practice and directions for future research. GCED aims to help (future) citizens feel they belong in (g)local contexts and enable them to take responsible action. For such values to be effectively communicated, teachers and teacher educators arguably need to *embody* the values underpinning curricula and teaching materials through expanding creative teacher talk repertoires which entail noticing and responding appropriately to all children's developing needs.

The educational ideals and aims described in this chapter – teaching and learning to sustain awareness and change at individual, local, national and international levels – are both crucial and challenging. Hopefully, educators can bridge the gap from idealism to enactments in YL-congruent ways. We can thus relieve young children – who are often aware of daunting (g)local challenges not of their making – of anxiety through effectively communicating to children our lived values and optimism.

Through story-based approaches which draw on GCED, well-supported and prepared teachers can bring reflections and emotional connections as well as language to life with the aim of creating imaginative, inclusive and thought-provoking multilingual environments where all learners can thrive.

### Key Takeaways

- In GCED with children, values, themes and aims need to be adapted to the characteristics and needs of specific YLs.
- When teaching languages to children, we can foster the development of critical thinking through adopting powerful educational synergies, such as picturebooks, which can best express both local and global lived experiences through teacher scaffolding.
- Stories and picturebooks, whether they address themes explicitly or indirectly, have the potential to be transformative.
- It is essential to approach the picturebook evaluation and selection process with attention and sensitivity.
- Story-based approaches can lend themselves to teacher-mediated pedagogical cycles leading YLs to an ever-deepening understanding of complex issues.

### Note

Martina Irsara is the lead author and wrote the sections 'Introduction,' 'Global Citizenship Education in ELT to YLs,' and 'Stories in Plurilingual and English Learning,' Valentina Gobbett Bamber wrote the sections 'Definitions and Value

of Picturebooks,' 'Selection and Evaluation Criteria,' 'Developing Teacher Talk: Read-Aloud and Oral Storytelling Competences and Stages,' 'Case Study: A Transnational Experience in Teacher Education,' and 'Conclusions and Future Prospects,' and Barbara Caprara wrote the section 'Montessori Approaches in ELT and GCED Using Picturebooks.'

## References and Further Reading

- Bader, B. (1976). *American picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*. Macmillan.
- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (3rd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Bland, J. (2015). *Teaching English to young learners: Critical issues in language teaching with 3–12 year olds*. Bloomsbury.
- Bland, J. (2022). *Compelling stories for English language learners: Creativity, interculturality and critical literacy*. Bloomsbury.
- Bryon, N. (2019). *Look up!* (D. Adeola, Illus.). Puffin.
- Caprara, B. (2020). *Innovare la didattica con i principi montessoriani*. Armando.
- Caprara, B. (2022). *La natura nel pensiero di Maria Montessori*. Junior.
- Consalvo, G. (2020). *Il bambino costruttore di competenza plurilingue nella scuola Montessori*. Angeli.
- Consalvo, G. (2022, 1 February). *Bellezza e verità: Montessori e i libri: Intervista a Giulia Consalvo*. Scaffale Basso. <https://www.scaffalebasso.it/montessori-e-i-libri-intervista-a-giulia-consalvo>
- Cossentino, J. (2005). Ritualizing expertise: A non-Montessorian view of the Montessori method. *American Journal of Education*, 111(2), 211–244.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, G., & Brewster, J. (2014). *Tell it again: The storytelling handbook for primary English language teachers*. British Council.
- Ellis, G., & Mourão, S. (2021). Demystifying the read-aloud. *English Teaching Professional*, 136, 22–25.
- Fisher, R. (2005). *Teaching children to learn* (2nd ed.). Thornes.
- Gazibara, S. (2013). Head, heart and hands learning: A challenge for contemporary education. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 4(1), 71–82.
- Ghosn, I.-K. (2013). Humanizing teaching English to young learners with children's literature. *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, 1(1), 39–57.
- Gobbett Bamber, V. (2024). Oral storytelling pedagogies in teaching English to young learners: Implications for English language teacher education. In M. C. Gatti & J. Hoffmann (Eds.), *Storytelling as a cultural practice: Pedagogical and linguistic perspectives* (pp. 277–296). Lang.

- Irsara, M. (2023). English and other languages in a plurilingual pedagogical approach: A case study from northern Italy. *Glottodidactica: An International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 50(1), 119–140.
- Jeffers, O. (2012). *This moose belongs to me*. (O. Jeffers, Illus.). HarperCollins Children's Books.
- Kirsch, C. (2024). Monolingual and translingual dialogic reading practices in early childhood education. *Creative Education*, 15(11), 2259–2278.
- Koppel, M. (2025). Global citizenship education and ELT? A Survey of pre-service English teachers' views. *Zeitschrift für Schul- und Professionsentwicklung*, 7(2), 118–144.
- Lütge, C., Merse, T., & Rauschert, P. (Eds.). (2023). *Global citizenship in foreign language education: Concepts, practices, connections*. Routledge.
- Mastellotto, L. (2023). Global citizenship education with picture books in English language learning. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 28(1), 211–240.
- Milner, K. (2019). *It's a no money day*. (K. Milner, Illus.). Barrington Stoke.
- Montessori, M. (1982). *The secret of childhood*. Ballantine Books.
- Montessori M. (2007). *La mente del bambino*. Garzanti.
- Mourão, S. (2023). Picturebooks for intercultural learning in foreign language education: A scoping review. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 28(1), 173–209.
- Pennycook, A. (2018). *Posthumanist applied linguistics*. Taylor and Francis.
- Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford University Press.
- Read, C. (2008). Scaffolding children's learning through story and drama. *IATEFL Young Learner*, 2, 6–9.
- Rolfe, K. (2023). *Wolf and bear*. (K. Rolfe, Illus.). Two Hoots.
- Seichter, S. (2024). *Der lange Schatten Maria Montessoris: Der Traum vom perfekten Kind*. Beltz.
- UNESCO. (2014). *Global citizenship education: Preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729>
- UNESCO. (2015). *Global citizenship education: Topics and learning objectives*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.54675/DRHC3544>
- UNESCO. (2024, 27 May). *What you need to know about global citizenship education*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/global-citizenship-peace-education/need-know>
- United Nations. (2012). *Global education first initiative: An initiative of the United Nations secretary-general*. [https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/%5BENG%5D%20Global%20Education%20First%20Initiative\\_o.pdf](https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/%5BENG%5D%20Global%20Education%20First%20Initiative_o.pdf)
- Valente, D. (2022). Scaffolding in-depth learning: Picturebooks for intercultural

citizenship in primary English teacher education. In D. Valente & D. Xerri (Eds.), *Innovative practices in early English language education* (pp. 259–283). Palgrave Macmillan.

Wei, L. (2018). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30.

Yousafzai, M. (2017). *Malala's magic pencil*. (Kerascoët, Illus.). Puffin.

Zadra, C., Mastellotto, L., & Moser, S. (2024). *Ponti narrativi: Prospettive transdisciplinari nell'educazione alla cittadinanza globale*. Pensa MultiMedia.