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Danger of a Single Picture
A Storybook about Multiple Perspectives

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January 2020

Connecticut, USA; Munich, Germany

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Contents

Preface

Project Group

Short Stories

The Danger of a Single Picture (*Stefanie Wölfl, Maximilian Hauer*)

Two Friends a World Apart (*Nora Röver, Josef Matosevic*)

The Walk (*Josefine Winter, Sebastian Lory*)

Tea-time Shenanigans (*Gabbie Melamed, Lisa Naples*)

No Choice, Multiple Choice (*Angie Mastropietro, Michael Gaiewski*)

ESL Math Classroom of Vegetables (*Daniel Mourad, Christopher Hayes*)

About the Cover

Acknowledgements

Preface

This multimodal storybook is the outcome of an intercultural, interdisciplinary and collaborative project between a foreign languages course in Germany and a mathematics course in the United States. Dr. Petra Rauschert lead the foreign languages group of students who were participating in a course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. The mathematics group was lead by Professor Fabiana Cardetti whose students were participating in a course on mathematics education at the University of Connecticut.

We engaged in this collaboration as part of our learning about intercultural communicative competence using the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture [RFCDC] (Barrett et al., 2018). The RFCDC model proposes 20 competences that are organized into four groups: values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding. For this particular activity we focused on the competences related to values.

Process

For this activity our students first reflected on the competences presented in the RFCDC with a focus on values. We then used Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009) as a starting point to reflect on local and global issues that can/should be seen from more than one perspective. The students finally wrote short stories in which they address these issues. The topics they chose are all related to the domain of values in the RFCDC.

We used Google Slides for our collaboration because it allowed us to share the entire project content in a single file and comment on each other's work. We collaborated at every step in the creation of the short stories, i.e. we provided and responded to feedback, insights, and questions from the original brainstorming of ideas through to the final drafts of the stories. Students also created audio or video versions of their stories to further enhance the storybook, as well as to make these stories available to the visually impaired. The project outcome is this multimodal (digital) storybook that tries to inspire its readers to see things from different angles.

We hope you enjoy!

Petra and Fabiana

(on behalf of the entire LMU/UConn project team)

References

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Project Group



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The Story of a Single Picture

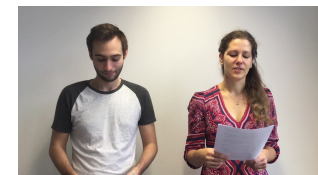
Stefanie Wöfl and Maximilian Hauer, LMU



There are some pictures that have changed history. The picture of a young girl, running down the street, naked, her face distorted with pain, her skin burnt during a Napalm attack on her home town in Vietnam. Pictures of people from eastern Berlin, standing on top of the Berlin wall, cheering, tearing down the wall by sheer force of will. In 2015, German newspapers, journals and TV talk shows were flooded with pictures that would soon develop a similar force in Germany and throughout Europe: pictures of tens of thousands of refugees, men, women and children of all ages, arriving in Germany by train. And pictures of thousands of people welcoming them, willing to offer their help. Within weeks, these pictures were replaced by numbers: Thousands of refugees per day, hundreds of thousands within a few months, more than one million in 2015 – these were the kinds of headlines you could soon find in the media. But this story is not about numbers – it is about people, and the pictures we have of them.



Listen to the story here



When I was in kindergarten, the picture I had of an immigrant was quite clear-cut. It was the picture of a middle-aged man, his hair at the threshold of turning from black to grey, wearing blue overalls and speaking with a funny accent. It was the picture of a neighbour living across the street. I admired him because he had once told me he was a builder. He had given up his life at home and left his family – he was from Poland – to get a better-paying job in Germany. And he was only one out of thousands of people who had come to Germany as guest workers. But I would only learn about this much later. Back then, he was just cool. And he was my picture of an immigrant.

Some years later, when I was in elementary school, we discussed immigration in class. My teacher at the time asked who of us had a migration background. As I looked around, I saw more and more pupils raising their hands – more and more of my peers, my classmates, my friends. And I was surprised. I was surprised because people were raising their hands who were not wearing blue overalls, who did not work in construction, who did not even have a funny accent. I was surprised because they simply didn't fit into my picture.

When I got home that day, my mother asked me what we had done at school. I told her about my teacher's question, and she asked me if I had also raised my hand. I gave her a puzzled look. Why would I? She laughed. And she told me about my grandmother, who was born in the Czech Republic, and who came to Germany as a refugee after World War II. She showed me pictures of my grandma as a young girl, pictures taken in her hometown before she had to leave. That was when I understood that the problem wasn't that the others didn't fit into my picture. The problem was that my picture had simply been deficient. It had not been entirely wrong, but it had been incomplete.

When I'm at my grandparent's house, I like looking at the large picture hanging on the wall of the living room. My grandmother and grandfather in the centre, surrounded by my Mom and her brothers, my Dad, my siblings and me standing next to my mother. You can tell immediately that we are related – the same hair, the same smile, the same blue and green eyes. It is apparent that this is a family picture.

And yet, this is not the whole picture. Next to one of my uncles, there is a tall, long-legged woman, her skin black, her hair curly. She is carrying a little boy with the same curly, dark hair, the same color of skin and the same nose as my grandpa and my uncle. In front of her a second boy, smiling, his face strikingly similar to hers, except for the tone of his skin – which is almost as fair as my own. He is my cousin.

On the left, my cousin's wife is smiling into the camera, her red hair and the freckles in her face giving away her Irish roots. Next to my other uncle, there is a small woman. Her round face is surrounded by long silk hair, her almond-shaped eyes and small lips give her a typically Asian appearance.

This is still a picture of my family. But it is more diverse than some would expect – like the waitress in a restaurant, offering us separate tables because she couldn't believe we were one family; or my grandparents' friends, who were at least slightly surprised when my half-African aunt was visiting and answered the door to them. Sometimes, people are confused, incredulous, astonished - because the whole picture is more complex than they would have assumed.

In 2015, when I saw the media coverage of refugees arriving in Munich, I remembered that day in elementary school. And while politicians and the media started to fervently discuss immigration as a source of danger, violence and crime, I knew that this was not the whole picture.

It's true – some pictures have changed history. But it's not always about pictures in newspapers or on TV. Sometimes, it's the pictures in our minds that make the difference. And very often, these pictures are incomplete.

Our story and the RFCDC

We wrote this story to demonstrate how we may sometimes develop stereotypical views almost subconsciously. To avoid this, it seems to be crucial for us to regularly question ourselves, our ideas and views. With our story we are hoping to inspire people to do so, and to become aware of, accept and embrace the diversity and ambiguity surrounding us.

valuing cultural diversity

openness to cultural otherness

respect

tolerance of ambiguity

knowledge and critical understanding of the self

(can reflect critically on his/ her own stereotypes and what lies behind them)

Two Friends a World Apart



Nora Röver and Josip Matosevic, LMU

I live with my parents and my sister in a two-story house. My sister and I have our own rooms although they are not very big. I am really happy here.

I have five siblings and I love them. We live in a two-room house with our mom. I share a room with my brothers and the girls sleep with our mother. That is my home.

On Saturday morning, I walk to the well in our neighborhood. It's hot and we don't have running water. We get our water from the well.

This Saturday, we went to our local swimming pool and had a lot of fun! Unfortunately father wasn't able to come because of work.

Listen to the story here

THE TEFL-GROUP PRESENTS
TWO FRIENDS A
WORLD APART

BY JOSIP MATOSEVIC & NORA RÖVER

At home I put on my Kippa and we started praying to god for this wonderful day and that we have enough water and food.

When I'm back home, my family and I are praying. We have rugs on the floor. We pray to Mekka. For something better.

It hit the earth and it shook. My world shook. I hid under the table, but I heard plates fall. Everything fell and crashed.

I was taking an apple from the table when suddenly breaking news came on the TV: there was a new bomb attack. I am scared because father still hasn't returned from work.

On TV they say that the war has taken the lives of 70 of our soldiers. I think about how those children must feel without their fathers now.

After we put everything in order, we turn on the TV. The news reporter says that 2.000 of our people died. I can't even imagine what two thousand people really means.

The war scares me. Killing. Bombing. Death. I'm a child. I don't know a world without it.

I hate that there are always problems in my country, especially when I know someone in my family is outside. I am also really sad that I can't play with my friend if there is trouble outside.

I am Mohammed. I am from Gaza. *I am Abraham. I live in Israel.* We are friends and live in the same country, but still worlds apart.

Our story and the RFCDC

Our story deals with the conflict between Muslims and Jews in Israel. Since this is a complicated and multilayered topic, it refers to several categories in the RFCDC. In order to show similarities and differences, the story is parallelly told from two perspectives: by a child from Israel and a child from Gaza.

valuing human dignity and human rights

(human right to water;
no child should experience war/death)

respect for religious differences

(their prayers)

openness to cultural otherness

(the friendship between the two boys)

analytical and critical thinking skills

(media coverage of the conflict)

critical understanding of the world

(disapproval of violence)

The Walk

Josefine Winter and Sebastian Lory, LMU



Have you ever thought about the backstories of the people you come across?

I haven't really until now, as I discovered that you should be careful about the way you perceive your surroundings.

But before I tell you what happened, I would like to tell you something about myself. My name is Thomas and I´m pretty average if you ask statistics. I'm a 23-year-old German student studying engineering science at the University of Munich. I'm single and live in a student dormitory. And I have a part time job to finance my studies. I'm good at some sports but I'm not the healthiest person on the planet. I try my best to contribute to a good living environment. I recycle, use reusable coffee cups and sometimes help my grandparents with gardening.

But now back to the story I wanted to tell you.....

[Listen to the story here](#)



It's lunch time and I'm on my way to the bakery. A homeless guy is sitting in front of our university building and asking for money. I see people passing him and rolling their eyes. I can feel their disgust and the way they despise him. He's just sitting there, so why should I give him my hard earned money? Maybe he has done something wrong or made a bad choice. I have to take responsibility for my decisions as well, so why shouldn't he do the same? Maybe he's just too lazy to go to work. He should have been more careful with the choices he made. I keep on walking thinking that everybody is responsible for their own fate.

A few moments later I pass a group of students. One of them is quite chubby and the others are making fun of him. Well, again, he is probably responsible for this. I mean, I'm not the fittest person in the world either but I try my best to do some exercises and don't always eat unhealthy stuff. Judging by the way he looks, he doesn't do any sports and he is eating way too much chocolate. No wonder they are making fun of him.

Finally, I arrive at the bakery and make my usual order. I'm pretty hungry already. It's 1,50 € for one pretzel, that's quite expensive but I don't always have the time to bring my own lunch from home. Besides, my flatmates sometimes eat all my stuff without asking. I only have a hundred Euro bill. The worker raises her eyebrow, quickly glances at me and takes the hundred Euro bill. As she stretches out her hand with my change, I quickly take it, together with my food, and leave the bakery. While I am eating, I wonder why the woman gave me that look. And then it pops into my head, she must have been surprised that a student would pay with a hundred Euro bill and assumed that I was rich. Sadly, these 100 Euros are all I have for the whole month. She must have a totally wrong impression of me now. But there is really more to it.

And then, suddenly, I think about the homeless person sitting in front of the university. Maybe he is not responsible for his current situation. Maybe he wants to work, but life won't let him. But doesn't everyone have the right to work? What has happened to him? And why was I creating a single story in my mind that belittled him for sitting there? It is not always as easy as it seems at first glance..

And what about the chubby boy? Maybe he is also not responsible for the way he looks. There could have been an accident, or some complications while he was born. He could be ill, have irresponsible parents who don't care about his health or maybe the boy's life is just that hard, so he compensates with eating. And then why didn't I think of these reasons beforehand? Why are the others making fun of him and how could I dare thinking that their rudeness might be justified, although I'm a person who believes in respect and being kind to others no matter what? That's not how it should be.

No one on this planet should be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment. It does not matter what someone looks like or what kind of economic status he or she has, we all have to treat others with the same respect that we want to be treated with. And therefore, it does not make any sense to pigeonhole people, because that is where discrimination starts.

Discrimination is a way of thinking and how you perceive your environment and the people surrounding you. I have learned that discrimination starts in the way we categorize people at first glance. Everyone should be treated the same way, regardless of what they look like or where they come from. Because you can never know the reason why people look or behave the way they do. There is always a backstory of what made people be the way they are.

And now I'm sitting here at university in a class full of different people. We as a group of students may appear similar on the outside, because most of us probably have come from a similar social and financial background and the majority even from the same culture. We are all different. I am realizing that we all have backstories. No one is like the other and that's a great thing. We may have gotten rid of disconnecting mindsets, systems that keep us thinking that we are separate from others or views like segregation, but we still haven't torn down the walls in our minds. These walls still hold us back and keep us away from becoming citizens of the world and not just people with a single story. Because equality and human dignity start with your own thoughts. We have to reflect upon our daily encounters and learn from them. It starts with one puzzle piece before we can try to get the full picture.

Our story and the RFCDC

Our story deals with discrimination and how we all can sometimes be guilty of it. We mainly focused on values concerning human rights and human dignity. No one on this planet should be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment.

With our story we wanted to emphasise how important it is to pay attention to one's very own thoughts and actions because discrimination starts with a certain mindset. And we have to start with ourselves before we judge others.

valuing human dignity and human rights

striving for mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue

equality

treating all people with respect

Tea-time Shenanigans



Gabbie Melamed and Lisa Naples, UConn

...6 months ago during the Women in Math club tea-time, shenanigans ensued....

Dr. Persona is in the math department to give a colloquium talk, and the Women in Math student club organized a pre-talk tea to ask Dr. Persona about her experience as a mathematician.

Dr. Persona: So what do you all want to talk about? Do you have any questions for me?

(A few seconds of silence)

Student: I have a question. How did you become interested in math?

Dr. P: Well when I was young—

Dr. H: I became interested in math when I was five years old. I discovered that the sum of the first $n=100$ whole numbers is $\frac{(n)(n+1)}{2}$. I was hooked.

everyone groans

[Listen to the story here](#)

Dr. P: Alright, well do any students have other questions for me?

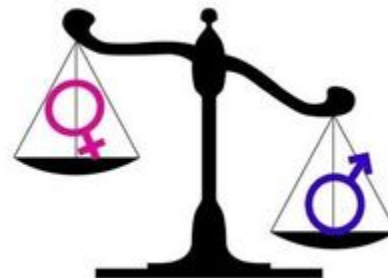
(A few more seconds silence)

Some student: Do you have any advice for women applying for positions in academia?

Dr. P: My experience was—

Dr. H: Well if you're a good enough candidate as any other applicant then I don't even see why we need to talk about this. You'll get the job if you deserve it.

....Tea time ends



Tea-time Shenanigans continued

Now

Beatrice and Clarissa are planning a pre-talk tea sponsored by the Women in Math club for this semester's colloquium talk.

B: I hope we don't run into the same problem as last time.

C: What happened last time? I don't remember there being a problem.

B: Professor H wouldn't shut up, just kept talking over Dr. P. And did you hear his "advice" for women applicants?! He really lives up to his name.

C: Ya know, he can be a bit abrasive but that's just his personality. He means well, and his advice was solid.

B: WHAT ADVICE?! He didn't give any advice. "You get the job if you deserve it?" He's oblivious to how the world works. He doesn't understand what it's like to be a woman in a male dominated field. If he comes again this time, who knows what nonsense he'll be spouting and who he'll be talking over.

C: What are you saying? Should he not be invited?

B: I think we should consider keeping this a "Women" only event. So we can prevent people like this from stealing a platform from the others.

C: But this would mean targeting and excluding specific people.

B: So what should we do?

Our story and the RFCDC

We wanted our story to be ambiguous. The opinions our characters take on are rather extreme. We hope that this makes it more difficult for the reader to passively "pick a side" and motivates them to think of a different conclusion-if even possible. How do we maintain equality and value cultural diversity without excluding others?

equality

sense of social responsibility for the fair treatment of all members of society, including equal opportunities for all irrespective of gender

valuing cultural diversity

cultural diversity is an asset for society; people can learn and benefit from other people's diverse perspectives; cultural diversity should be promoted and protected

respect

No Choice, Multiple Choice

Angie Mastropietro and Michael Gaiewski, UConn



Rey sits at her desk, anxiously awaiting Master Leia's entrance for class to begin. The exams from last week are being handed back today. The exam went well for Rey; she felt confident with her work, even though the answer options for some of the questions did not match the answer she got by solving them on her own. In fact, Rey was sure she was going to get an A since she spent two weeks studying and preparing for this exam. Besides, Calculus II was her favorite class (she always considered herself good at math) and Master Leia was always so kind in class and generous when grading the homework assignments.

Leia entered the room with a smile, took out the papers, and began passing them back to the other Padawans. As she did so, she observed each student's reaction to their grade. It was always difficult to see them get upset, whether they prepared for the exam or not.

[Listen to the story here](#)

Of course, Rey's paper was passed back last, as if the anticipation wasn't bad enough already. Leia reached out with the paper facing down. Rey took a deep breath, turning it over slowly. When she looked at her exam, in thick, red, permanent marker it said "55/100". Rey was dumbfounded, she had studied for hours and hours and didn't know how she could have possibly gotten such a low score. She had practiced so many questions and had worked in study groups, mostly leading them and helping other Padawans.

The rest of class passed by in a blur. Rey couldn't pay attention. She just kept going through the exam trying to figure out what went wrong. It was a lot of silly mistakes: dropping some negative signs here and there, addition and multiplication mistakes, forgetting constants... Since the exam was multiple choice, there was no way the final answer she got would show up as a possibility.

Rey didn't think this was fair. She had failed an exam because of minor algebra mistakes, but she clearly understood the concepts of differentiation and integration. If only the work she wrote down in the blank space counted instead of just the answer. Multiple choice exams means she couldn't receive any partial credit for her efforts. Maybe if she asked Leia about it, she would be able to gain some of the points back since, after all, all of the work was there and basically correct.

After class had ended and everyone else had left, Rey stayed behind while Leia was erasing the board. "Master Leia?" she approached the front of the room cautiously.

Leia turned around, "Young Padawan?" She saw the exam in her student's hand and knew it was going to be about the grade. Leia had seen Rey's reaction to her grade and knew that she was upset. Rey had always been a great student and achieved high marks. In fact, Leia was surprised when she graded Rey's exam in particular; she never would have expected a failing grade for her. "Questions about the exam?"

"I'm not sure how I failed this exam. I showed my work and my answers and I only made small mistakes! I studied so hard, and all I did was make some algebra mistakes! Do you think I can have some points back?" Rey pointed to one of the problems, "Here's my work. I set the problem up right and worked out the integral, plugged in the bounds... I just forgot over 3." Rey felt so defeated.

"Rey, it's a multiple choice exam. Either you picked the right answer or you didn't." In her many years of being a Jedi Master, Leia had dealt with many similar arguments from Padawans before. "If you made a mistake, then it's not done correctly. That's basically it."

“Well why are our exams multiple choice anyway? Isn’t math supposed to be more about the process than the end result?” Rey asked.

“The end result is important as well.” Leia grabbed her bag to go teach her next class, this conversation was coming to a close. “Besides, I have 70-plus other students’ exams to grade and I got these back to everyone after only a weekend. That wouldn’t be possible without the exam being multiple choice--able to grade so easily.” With that, Leia walked out the door, leaving Rey in the empty classroom by herself. Rey knew it was time to join the Dark Side.

Our story and the RFCDC

Our story addresses a common debate in the educational system regarding a method of evaluating students. We see a teacher and a student as they work to understand each other's views and the struggles that arise from the situation. It is our hope that this story inspires consideration for the circumstances of others and implies the importance of compromise.

fairness and equality

Sometimes the ability to think through multiple choice exams may make one miss the social responsibility for the just and fair treatment of all members irrespective of disability

human dignity

Affected when particular abilities and circumstances do not allow some to show their understanding

ESL Math Classroom of Vegetables

Daniel Mourad and Christopher Hayes, UConn



Mister Artichoke is teaching his eighth grade mathematics class. Everyone in the class speaks English as a second language, they are so-called ESL students. Roughly half of the students and Mr. Artichoke speak Spanish as their first language but the other half speak a variety of languages from around the world. Most of the non-Spanish speakers are the only ones in the classroom that know their particular native language. The Spanish speaking students occasionally discuss things amongst themselves for clarification, and they formed a study group after school where they all only speak Spanish. Several of the non-Spanish speaking students have been upset but silent about all of this. They form study groups but they are less effective because they have to communicate in English, which they do not know as well. Mister Artichoke has mostly been silent on the issue and has spoken Spanish in class on a few occasions to reinforce understanding, but unintentionally left out the non-Spanish speakers at these times. Sometimes he does “let the rest of the class know” what they discussed, but usually it is a brief summary and not a full translation of what he just said.

[Listen to the story here](#)

Today, the class is learning about right triangles and the Pythagorean theorem. Throughout this lesson, Mr. Artichoke uses the word 'hypotenuse' frequently. One of the students in his class doesn't remember what 'hypotenuse' means. A student named Beet raises his hand and asks Mister Artichoke,

"Mister Artichoke, what's a hypotenuse again?"

Mister Artichoke looks at Beet and starts explaining that:

"A triangle has tri, meaning three, sides. The two small sides are the legs and the third side is the hypotenuse. The hypotenuse is the longest side of a right triangle."

Beet stares at Mr. Artichoke for a moment and then, says:

"Okay, so, (mumbles) that means in this diagram...*La hipotenusa es el lado que está en diagonal a la esquina cuadrada del triángulo?*"

Beet's Spanish explanation proves enlightening to many of the other students. A few start asking follow up clarifying questions. The Spanish speaking group of students in the classroom are abuzz with discussion, all in Spanish.

Mr Artichoke then ends the hubbub with: "Okay, okay, yes, it seems we all understand now."

Then suddenly, Carrot yelled out and said:

"Mr. Artichoke, what did they say?"

Mr. Artichoke, a little flustered, tells Beet:

"Beet, can you tell Carrot what you just said in English?"

Beet retorts: "Well, I don't know exactly how to say it, can't you say it?"

Mr. Artichoke then says: "Beet said that the long side across from the square corner is what I meant by `hypotenuse`".

Carrot, who doesn't speak Spanish, says:

"It's not fair when you guys speak Spanish 'cause I don't know it. Can we just speak English? What did the rest of you guys say?"

Beet says, "I just want to know what Señor Artichoke meant. I'm not trying to leave you out."

Carrot says, "But you do this all the time. All of you speak Spanish and nobody else can learn properly."

Beet says, "But it helps us learn!"

Carrot says, "It's not fair!"

Beet replies, "It's not fair not to let us use our language!"

Carrot: "But we can't use our language! And you guys have that study group. It's not fair."

Beet: "We are just using what we can to learn."

Mister Artichoke: "Beet is right, we should try not to leave them out. It's okay to speak Spanish but let's not do it during class too much - every time you say something in Spanish you should repeat it in English. How does that sound? That way both languages have equal presence."

Mister Artichoke had been put into a difficult situation and was forced to make an off the cuff decision. His compromise gives the non-Spanish speaking students a more equal playing field and gives the Spanish speaking students more English practice. At the same time, it puts more burden on Spanish speaking students in his class. Mr. Artichoke might also have problems enforcing his rule, and the idea that Spanish deserves an equal presence when all the other "minority" languages have none may be a bit unfair.

Our story and the RFCDC

Our story is about the presence of multiple languages in a classroom, and how it affects the dynamics. It is complex because we must respect the different identities in the room, while making sure education is equitable and accessible to all. A flat ban of all languages other than the language of instruction privileges those who are native or fluent in the language of instruction, but in the case of an ESL classroom where no one is a native English speaker, other subtle dynamics appear. In our story, a dominant group of Spanish speakers begin a discussion in the middle of class creating conflict with those students who do not speak that language. Balancing equitability, respect, and dignity is tricky!

fairness

Recognition that all people share a common humanity and have equal dignity: Is it fair when some of the students don't speak the other language?

dignity

Use of first language is a source of dignity for students - not including those languages in school reduces the value of their heritage.

cultural diversity

Recognition that people should listen to and engage in dialogue with those who are perceived to be different from themselves: respect for minority languages.

About the cover

“The artwork on the cover is a pastiche of the things that creatively were going around my mind:

1. The Ted talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the message it delivers made me remember that I have a German language class colleague who came from Ethiopia. She tells her story about traversing several African countries to get here to Germany where she had to deal with different cultural shocks, so that when she arrived finally to Europe nothing could really shock her here anymore. Well, that’s her, in the picture. Basically, the perfect subject to be drawn and grab all attention on a close-up of a multilayer composition.

2. So to reflect the multiple number of sides of a story and also fueled by one of my hobbies which is manga, I implemented the figure of the woman on top of a Japanese street of Osaka where one can feel imbued by the multiplicity of messages sent by the advertisements to the mass of people going through. Since I recently started working with a new illustration program, new tools and hardware, I just wanted to see if I could reproduce one of the panels of the manga stories that usually amazes me.

3. The final effect is both things looking at each other: the ad messages beaming on a second plane and the face on first plane looking back to them. Those two do not belong together at all, which is the same feeling when you start reading about the new/alternative narratives of colonization/wars, both from other countries and cultures like mine, Spain, where although the civil war and the dictatorship finished decades ago, you can still feel in the media the narrative and ideological war between the different sides of society, the manipulation of history, the cherry-picking or just plain awful history revisionism, or how I like to call it: history fiction.

This is just my humble contribution to Ngozi’s claim.” (Servando Diaz, designer of the cover)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Prof. Christiane Lütge (Chair of TEFL and Director of the Munich Centre of Teacher Education, LMU) and Prof. Ambar Sengupta (Head of the Department of Mathematics, UConn) for supporting this collaboration between the Department of Mathematics of the University of Connecticut and the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Munich.

We would also like to thank Prof. Michael Byram for initiating the 'Cultnet RFCDC Project - Principles and Practicalities', which was the starting point of this collaboration, and for constantly inspiring educators and students from all over the world to engage in intercultural citizenship.

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Sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) (grant no 01PL17016). Any opinions expressed here are those of the author.