

Glocal Perspectives in Film-Based Foreign Language Education: Teaching about Sustainability with “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” (2019)

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Abstract

The film “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” is based on the memoir of William Kamkwamba and tells the story of how William’s family battles a life-threatening draught in Malawi. Through a glocal lens, i.e. by looking at the interplay of locality and globality, the film offers critical insights into the importance of sustainability with regard to lasting and viable ecological, economic and social structures (cf. Volkmann, 2016). On a local level, the farmers in the film struggle to provide food for their families. A corrupt national government shows little interest in establishing economic support structures and education. In addition, the context is embedded in global dynamics and influenced by the legacy of colonialism. Focusing on topics such as sustainability, we will discuss how the film lends itself for a content-based approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Drawing on the theory of glocal education in the context of critical foreign language education that goes beyond functional language teaching and puts forward a critical understanding and the value of a democratic, pluralistic and sustainable life (cf. Gerlach, 2020; Niemczyk, 2019; Volkmann, 2014), the focus of our contribution will be on task development. Starting from the assumption that sophisticated tasks are needed to encourage learners to engage critically and reflectively with the film’s content and aesthetics, we will suggest a viewing-log and scenic interpretation for dealing with the film in creative and personally engaging ways, which can also be transferred to contexts beyond the foreign language classroom.

Keywords

glocal education, globalization, critical foreign language education, sustainability, film

Including Glocal Perspectives in Film-Based Foreign Language Education

Today, films are an integral part of everyday culture. While platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime allow for easy access in private settings, schools and teachers increasingly realize the potentials the medium has to offer (e.g. Paran & Duncan, 2018). Especially in foreign language education, films

do not only provide input for language learning, they also have a broader educational value and offer the opportunity to learn about film-aesthetic composition. Films can also be used for cultural learning (cf. Donaghy, 2017; Viebrock, 2016), which encompasses the critical and self-reflective understanding of how cultures are depicted in a film. Our understanding of foreign language education – rooted in the German educational context – thus goes beyond

functional language learning and includes content-based approaches that in other educational contexts might be part of social studies, science education, or film studies.

Looking at opportunities for film-based critical foreign language education, this paper explores the question of how glocal perspectives can be included on both a theoretical and a practical level. Glocal perspectives can hereby help to challenge a simplistic understanding of globalization processes as a linear expansion and one-way flow from the global to the local (Blatter, 2006; Yazan, 2018). Conversely, glocal perspectives are based on the idea that “[l]ocal spaces are shaped and local identities are created by globalized contacts as well as by local circumstances” (Blatter 2006, p. 358). The notion of glocalization represents the dynamic and simultaneous interplay between globalizing and the localizing processes.

Our topical focus will be on sustainability, which aims at an ecologically and economically balanced, diverse and democratic world and poses a core challenge of our times. Since the introduction of United Nation’s Millennium Goals in 2000, which were expanded by the Sustainable Development Goals in 2016, sustainability has been increasingly recognized as a central category in educational contexts (United Nations, 2015; 2017). Among these interdependent goals, the Sustainable Development Goals encompass ambitions to overcome world hunger and support sustainable agriculture, allow for quality education worldwide, provide affordable and clean energy, and foster responsible consumption and production. Sustainability can be defined as the harmony between economic growth, environmental protection and social inclusion while meeting both the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations (United Nations; cf. also Volkmann, 2016).

As sustainability is closely linked to globalization, glocal perspectives are helpful for raising learners’ awareness and changing their behavior and lifestyles for a more sustainable future. While the UN’s Sustainable Development goals detail a global agenda, its realization as well as any discourses about sustainable development are always bound to the interplay between local, intermediate and global stakeholders. Sustainability as an objective depends on far-reaching “[...] changes in behaviour and lifestyles, changes which will need to be motivated by a shift in values and rooted in the cultural and moral precepts upon which behaviour is based” (United Nations, 2002, p. 11). Here too, employing glocal perspectives can provide a framework for learners’ reflections, as it allows for analyzing the interrelation between different local and global contexts as well as personally relating to and engaging with local contexts other than the learners’ own (cf. the viewing log below).

Given that concepts such as sustainability are largely communicated by different forms of texts, critical foreign language education offers the opportunity to critically scrutinize such texts which also include (audio-)visual formats such as film (Mayer & Wilson, 2006, p. 1). As a cultural product, films are themselves a glocal phenomenon. They are accessible across borders and interconnect the local to the global as they make visible and show a particular view on a local environment to an audience which in turn is situated within many different local environments and contexts. A reflection of the interplay between the representation of a local environment and diverging contexts of reception allows for a critical engagement with global and local issues in relation to the learners’ own behaviors and lifestyles. This engagement is a prerequisite for initiating change in relation to sustainability.

For elaborating on this position, we have selected the feature film “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” (Calderwood & Egan, 2019), a Netflix production, as an example geared towards proficient learners. While several other films that focus on sustainability can be suggested for language teaching (cf. Volkmann, 2016), “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” provides a visually appealing as well as thematically and aesthetically demanding interpretation of famine-ridden Malawi in the year 2001 that lends itself especially well for taking a glocal perspective within foreign language education. “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” addresses all UN’s Sustainable Development Goals introduced above, making topical food scarcity, the legacy of colonialism, political suppression, and the role of education. The film and its topics become accessible to learners through approachable aesthetics and visuals, using sound effects, camera perspectives and movements as well as editing styles that many viewers are familiar with from other mainstream (i.e. ‘global’) productions. At the same time, the film provides the audience with a challenging ‘local’ perspective, for example shown through frequent captions in Chichewa, the local Bantu language, and a strong focus on the representation of the Malawian village of Wimbe. Considering the selection of this film, one needs to be aware of possible stigmatizations of the African continent. While historically many other Hollywood productions have been criticized for telling white and Western stories or even reaffirming colonial stereotypes (Brereton, 2016), “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” shows how an African community – depicted in the person of the protagonist William Kamkwamba – is able to help themselves and gain a certain degree of economic self-sufficiency. However, the film also needs to be viewed critically, as it may lead to simplistic interpretations with regard to how the

people’s own agency and localized actions alone are presented as a means of overcoming financial and food security difficulties.

“The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” draws several interconnections between the local and the global, eventually requiring from the learners to critically reflect on their own personal contexts and lifestyles and how these may have an effect on events that are depicted in the film. In order to approach the film and develop meaningful tasks for foreign language learners, in the following chapter we will discuss the theoretical framework for teaching about environmental issues and sustainability in language education through a glocal lens. We will proceed to analyze the glocal interrelations portrayed in the film. Finally, we will suggest tasks and materials for “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” that actively engage language learners in the critical reflection of their role within the world.

Glocal education in the context of critical foreign language education

The framework we use for teaching about environmental issues and sustainability is that of critical foreign language education explicitly including glocal perspectives. Critical foreign language education is rooted in the belief that language teaching needs to address much more than functional communicative competences such as reading and writing. It “[...] instead raises more critical questions to do with access, power, disparity, desire, difference, and resistance” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 5). In the tradition of critical pedagogy, critical foreign language education lends itself to taking glocal rather than global perspectives as it encourages questioning dominant narratives of global capitalism, hegemonic power structures as well as the dominance of English as an international language (cf. Phipps & Guilherme, 2004). In

order to do so, learners have to understand how texts, films and other cultural products are produced and embedded in different local and global contexts as they never represent neutral perspectives (cf. Gerlach, 2020, p. 15). Lastly, critical foreign language education is participatory and geared towards an active transformation of the world and the self. Accordingly, Gerlach (2020, p. 22) identifies a central question to be answered when approaching texts or films with learners: What are the consequences of our actions?

Relating critical foreign language education to the concept of glocalization reflects the importance of understanding local and global interconnections and the power relations between the two entities. While the term *global* might be associated with standardization, *glocalization* suggests that there are differences concerning cultural, economical, social, political, and environmental issues between the local and the global (Niemczyk, 2019). Glocal perspectives on education can thus respond “[...] to contemporary ecological and social issues in ways that take account of the integrated nature of local and global processes” (Mannion, 2015, p. 29). However, compared to more established concepts such as global education (cf. Lütge, 2015; Volkmann, 2014), there are only few theoretical guidelines and no universal standards that define glocal education (cf. Niemczyk, 2019). A glocal perspective can help to find answers to questions dealing with abstract topics such as social injustice, gender, racism and sustainability. On one hand, a glocal perspective can show the global nature of each issue; on the other hand, it can situate abstract topics within different local environments. Abstract topics will thus become more tangible and locally relevant to learners. Taking up our example of sustainability, which as a global challenge is manifold and difficult to capture in its entirety, one can look at the local practices of

the learners (e.g. their consumption habits) and compare them to practices in a different local environment. In a next step, learners can analyze how both practices might be interrelated (e.g. how unsustainable behavior in one local environment causes ecological difficulties in another). In a final step and after realizing the consequences of personal actions, learners can transform their practices and inspire change on their own (e.g. by changing their own consumption behavior or by taking action at their local school).

Using these practices of critical foreign language education, we can further define the aims of what might be called glocal education. Glocal education encompasses the idea of thinking and acting locally and globally at the same time, focusing on topics shared with critical foreign language education, such as social responsibility, justice, and sustainability (cf. Patel & Lynch, 2013, p. 223). In a nutshell, glocal education

can be understood in terms of a form of dual citizenship that comes with privileges and responsibilities. We are all citizens of a specific nation, as well as citizens of the world, sharing the same goal to understand and sustain the world in which we live. Glocal education is meant to provide the capacity to recognize oneself in the narrative of the interconnected world as well as local realities. (Niemczyk, 2019, p. 13)

The educational aims of glocal education put forward respect for human rights and the ideals of a peaceful, democratic, pluralistic, emancipatory and sustainable world. They include taking responsibility for sustainable

ecological, economic and social structures in accordance with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals we have outlined above. Both learners and teachers are understood as change agents who actively participate in and transform cultural, societal and political practices (cf. Niemczyk, 2019).

Drawing again on the example of sustainability, key aims such as sharing natural resources fairly and triggering processes of change can only be realized if one understands glocal interrelations and looks beyond individual needs. According to Lütge (2015, p. 10), material used for sustainable development

[...] needs to explore the economic, political, and social implications of sustainability by encouraging the learners to reflect critically on their own areas of the world, to identify non-viable elements in their own lives as well as the tensions among conflicting aims.

Correspondingly, for glocal education learners need to be encouraged to adopt and coordinate different perspectives, which can easily be done by using fictional texts, including film. Glocal education systematically highlights local circumstances by analyzing selected texts and films for the interrelations of global and local perspectives. What is more, through the identification with one of the characters or the confrontation with extreme situations, processes of meaning-making and negotiation can be initiated and thus have an impact on learners' attitudes and behaviors.

“The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind”

Verbal or audio-visual fictional texts can especially support learners in taking on different perspectives as their aesthetic make-up challenges the recipient to look at how they are composed. Having chosen “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” as an example, we analyze the film through a glocal lens in order to shed light on the different interrelations of the local and the global within the film as well as between the film and its audience. In the subsequent chapter, we then suggest possible tasks for language learners to access these perspectives.

The film is set in Malawi, Africa, between 2001 and 2002. Historically, Malawi is a former British colony. After its independence it became a totalitarian one-party state until 1994. Since the mid-1990s, Malawi has had a multi-party democratic government, yet the country continues the struggle to establish democratic processes and fight against corruption. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Africa. Its economy is mainly based on agriculture. An increase of weather-related disasters affecting agriculture and a lack of political stability have led to a dependence on outside aid. Today, still an extremely high number of inhabitants live below the national poverty line (cf. Menon, 2007).

Especially during the draught of 2001/02, which inspired the film, former president Bakili Muluzi and his government were accused of corruption and mismanaging the country's food supplies. “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” shows the events leading to the famine and its effects in the local village of Wimbe. Based on the memoir of the protagonist (Kamkwamba & Mealer, 2010), the film tells the story of the teenage boy William Kamkwamba who managed to build a functioning windmill out of scraps to help his family and village overcome the draught. The windmill that

William manages to build at the end of the film is capable of powering a water pump to water the dry fields whereas the windmill that William built in real life only harnessed energy to power lights (cf. *ibid.*). Thus playing with the dimensions of fictionality and factuality (cf. Browse, Gibbons, & Hatavara, 2019; Fiorelli, 2016), the film oscillates between suggesting a realistic representation of the Malawian surroundings and exaggerating William as the dramatic hero who seems to be able to work wonders. One can both argue that the film tells a story of Malawian agency and at the same time runs the risk of reinforcing existing stereotypes of the Malawian landscape and the difficulties the people face – depending on the prior knowledge of the audience and their willingness to adopt a critical perspective.

The dryness of the land and constant windiness are already made visible and hearable in the establishing shots of the film. The audience gets to know William as the 13-year-old son of farmers living in these harsh circumstances. He lives with his father Trywell, his mother Agnes and his older sister Annie in a simple house with no access to electricity or running water. Already early on in the film, William fixes his neighbors' radios, showing his interest in electronics and physics and foreshadowing his inventive spirit that would later save the village. Soon the settlement is ridden by floods which destroy large parts of the harvest. The floods are followed by a long draught and Wimbe's inhabitants start running out of food. While at the beginning of the film, Trywell had proudly bought William a school uniform and provided for his son's education, many families including William's are now unable to pay the requested tuition fees. William is forced to help his father farm the dry fields and even gets expelled from school for attending class without having paid fees. In the school's library, he had found an American book titled

“Using Energy” with which he planned to build a windmill to save the harvest. When William finally gets access to the book and a bicycle dynamo for his project, he needs to repurpose his father's bike to build the windmill. His father, unable to imagine how the construction would work, refuses William at first. Only at the end of the film he finally gives in and William successfully builds the windmill. The film ends by showing the real-life William Kamkwamba who served as the story's inspiration while he attends university and gives a TED-talk about his achievements.

Following Blatter's (2006) understanding of the concept, “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” shows glocalization on three different levels. Blatter (2006) argues for a more specific definition of the term glocalization that goes beyond a differentiation between the local and the global. For this, he suggests a distinction between a supranational, national and subnational level. Looking at the subnational level of the feature film, William's family and the local farmers in Wimbe struggle to provide food for their families. This is connected to national policy and a corrupt government that shows little interest in establishing economical support structures and education. What is more, these national structures are situated within supranational contexts that extend national borders. Deforestation driven by international agents is advanced in the area of Wimbe, which results in a lack of protection from floods and leaves the farmers with no way to dry the tobacco they have harvested from their fields. Hence, tobacco farming as an opportunity for national or subnational economic growth clashes with global powers and an aspired production for the world market. In this context, Malawi suffers from the legacies of colonialism, both old and new, resulting in political and economic instability. Though not made topical in the film directly, this

legacy becomes visible in an authoritarian government and the economic power of internationally operating companies that control Malawian trade to serve the consumer needs of distant countries (e.g. in the tobacco and wood industry).

When combining critical and glocal perspectives, it becomes visible in “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” that global powers often suppress the local – which is all the more reason to make visible local perspectives in critical language education which would otherwise remain underrepresented (cf. Leonhardt & Viebrock 2020). One scene that exemplifies such a relation between a local Malawi community and a Western audience is easy to miss. At the beginning of the film, William repairs a radio for a group of young workers who want to listen to a football match (0:24:20-0:27:00). As the radio springs to life, a reporter informs his listeners about two airplanes having hit the World Trade Center. This news is all but dismissed by the young crowd for the football match, which shows how little importance an event of global magnitude such as the terror attacks on 9/11 had on a local context in Malawi. Vice versa, while the viewers of the film from the Western hemisphere will be familiar with the devastating local and global effects of 9/11, they will be less familiar with the disastrous famine that had hit Malawi at the same time, killing an estimated 3.000 people. While the teenagers in the film do not want to listen to the report, the event has a significant impact on their lives nonetheless. When William and his father ask an old friend who works in the food business for help, he tells them that markets around the world have crashed due to a terrorist attack on the United States, and that he can offer no help (0:34:40-0:38:40). While there may have been additional reasons why Malawi felt the effects of the market (e.g. because foreign governments were calling for the country’s debts to be repaid), the film

highlights how global forces dictate the fate of the protagonists, and viewers are shown how their own lives are connected to the events in Malawi. In the same vein, William and Trywell’s friend works for the tobacco industry, and viewers must wonder in how far local practices are impacted by Western tobacco consumption, and the deforestation of the land that triggered the floods and draughts in the first place is to be seen as a direct result of the global exploitation of the local farmers. While the effects of 9/11 were thus felt even in Malawi, and arguably all over the world, the effects of Malawi’s drought were mostly only locally felt. A critical and glocal approach, however, aims to make visible to learners how local narratives and global challenges are intertwined for a more sustainable future.

Glocal interrelations and power structures are also represented in the film by the use of two languages, namely English and the local Bantu language Chichewa (leading to large parts of the film being subtitled). English as an international and formerly colonial language is depicted as a language of access, which can be denied by the superior power. For example, William is denied access to knowledge and education when he needs to use a book from the library. In the context of education, mostly English is dominant, while in the family and in the village the local language Chichewa is spoken. English is also dominant in political contexts. When the first effects of the draught hit Wimbe, the president (not named directly in the film) visits the area (0:46:30-0:52:10). In front of the local crowd, Wimbe’s chief is allowed to speak. His speech, delivered in English, criticizes the government for neglecting the region’s struggles with food scarcity. Upon this unwanted criticism, the government reacts immediately by taking away the chief from the microphone. Not only is he denied his right to speak, he is brutally beaten by government henchmen in a side alley,

leading to his death later in the film. English served as a language of access to a political voice for the chief, which, however, is quickly denied by the government's display of physical power.

The government as depicted in the film also systematically restricts access to education as a means of social mobility and building a sustainable future. For most of the film and despite his ambitions and interests, William is not able to fulfill his educational potential as the principal is instructed to only allow learners into school who can pay tuition. The following conversation between the headmaster and the librarian after William has been caught sneaking into the library shows how the librarian perceives William's attitude towards education and his desire to learn:

Mr. Ofesi [the headmaster]:
There's nothing I can do about it, Mrs. Sikelo. I cannot ignore him sneaking into the school.
Mrs. Sikelo [the librarian]: But he was not sneaking into the school. Don't you see, Mr. Ofesi? Can you not see that he's been sneaking out of the fields?
(0:57:50-0:58:20)

Both William and his family understand the value of education for improving their overall situation, which is constantly undermined by economic hardships. However, while the global perspective that the film also takes dictates education as a key force for a more sustainable future, a glocal perspective can ask why 'working in the field' and education are seen as a dichotomy here, rather than two sides of the same coin (something that is visible at the end of the film when William succeeds at building the windmill to water the fields).

Beyond the narrative of the film, the 'glocal lens' can also be applied to its stylistic

and aesthetic elements. Aspects of glocalization are presented through the use of symbols. For example, before building his windmill, the protagonist finds a US-American book titled "Using Energy", representing global knowledge that William is able to emulate in his local context. The windmill that William succeeds to build serves as a symbol of glocalization itself. The protagonist uses several materials from the local surroundings (such as wood) and recycles other, more global items (his teacher's dynamo, an old car battery and his father's bike). The windmill also triggers much controversy between William and his father which can be explained from a glocal standpoint. To build the windmill, William needs his father's bike, which the latter holds dear as it is the only vehicle that can carry him to and from town. While most viewers will be able to fathom the potential of a windmill (and the power of knowledge and education), Trywell cannot believe in his son's idea. He has simply never seen a windmill and how it can harness wind for energy. In comparison to most viewers who will readily believe in William's potential, Trywell has an entirely different perspective informed by his local knowledge, experiences and beliefs.

Glocal interrelations are furthermore inscribed in the film's visuals, which helps a global audience to gain access to the African continent, the country of Malawi and the local area of Wimbe. The aesthetic make-up of the film is geared towards the viewing habits of international audiences, using shots, editing and music that they will be familiar with from any number of Hollywood productions. For example, the film's establishing shots resemble those of director Ejirofor's previous work as an actor in "12 Years a Slave" (Pitt et al., 2014) as both films show the respective landscape and the fields the protagonists tend to (cf. Leonhardt, 2016). The dry, sandy, mainly brown and muted color palette in these shots and throughout the film

depicts the dryness of the land. Being filmed in the actual area of Wimbe, the film's visuals transport the viewers to this rather remote area. It can be argued that being able to identify with and relate to the events shown in a film are a precondition for reflecting one's own position and perspective. William's journey, which consists of overcoming obstacles before prevailing as the film's main hero, is also geared towards international audiences, connecting a local story from Wimbe with a hero's narrative familiar to many viewers.

Tasks for teaching “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” in the context of glocal education

Up to now, hardly any concrete suggestions on how to implement glocal perspectives to film-based foreign language teaching exist, as previous approaches either focus in general on cultural learning with film (cf. Viebrock, 2016) or on global education and sustainability (cf. Volkmann, 2016). In this chapter we present several tasks that, through the glocal lens, encourage learners to engage with the previously analyzed scenes of “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” in a critical and reflective way. Both film and tasks are geared towards more proficient learners at upper secondary level (or possibly college in different educational contexts): The chosen approaches challenge learners to engage actively and creatively with the film and are situated within the interplay of rational film analysis and a more holistic and/or emotional enjoyment of film (cf. Decke-Cornill & Luca, 2007; Viebrock, 2016). While film analysis fosters a critical understanding of the film's content and aesthetic make-up and is the basis for any subsequent reflections, the holistic perception of film caters to the pleasure of watching films. Connecting this to the objectives of glocal education, the interplay of film analysis and a holistic

perception of film enables learners to change perspective, reflect on the question of how the film's content relates to their own lives, and possibly invoke changes in their attitudes and behaviors. For a practical implementation that tries to bridge the gap between film analysis and a holistic perception of film, we propose a viewing log and a scenic interpretation task (see illustration 1).

The viewing log is a multimodal (and possibly digital) account of a learner's thoughts, analyses and interpretations of a film. Its tasks focus on cultural aspects and therefore glocal understanding of the film, and integrate questions on the film's aesthetic design as well (cf. Donaghy, 2019; Viebrock, 2016). Before watching the film, *task 1* asks learners to analyze the trailer and do research on the background of the film, as they might be rather unfamiliar with the local context in Malawi, including its colonial past. In addition, learners can also be asked to generally reflect on their own experiences with and attitudes towards school (*task 2*). While watching the film, these can be contrasted with William's experiences, comparing the 'local' in the film with the viewer's. During the film, the learners can take notes on character constellations, especially in relation to local, national and global forces presented in the film (*task 3*). This introduces them to the main analysis of local and global (power) relations in the film. Results will show how the national government contributes to the suppression and hardship of Wimbe's farmers. A close analysis and reflection of the scene in which the chief addresses the president in a critical speech and is brutally beaten by government officials will expand the learners' comprehension of glocal interrelations and power structures while also focusing on the use of language (*task 4*). The analytical *tasks 5* and *6* prompt learners to interpret the windmill as a glocal symbol and detect and interpret the glocal references made

visible through the attack on the World Trade Center. The final reflection asks learners to assess whether a film such as “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” can change peoples’ attitude and establish change towards a more sustainable future (*task 7*). To answer this question, they can also look at whether glocal analyses can help to change perspective and invoke such change.

Similar to the reflective writing tasks from the viewing log, scenic interpretation challenges learners to engage actively and creatively with the film. Creative and productive tasks allow learners to interact with film from a personal perspective, talk about their viewing experiences and feelings, exchange individual interpretations, and identify with different characters (cf. Crutchfield & Schewe, 2017; Leonhardt & Viebrock, 2016). Studies on the reception of English literature and film show that working actively and creatively with fictional texts does not only enhance learners’ enjoyment of fiction (cf. Freitag-Hild, 2010). Tasks such as the suggested role play (*task 8*) also help initiate a change of perspective and foster empathy. For the role play, learners stage a panel discussion at an imagined *Fridays for Future* event on sustainability with the director of the film, actors and actresses as well as the real William Kamkwamba. This task allows for a critical discussion on the film’s potential to spread awareness about sustainability as well as the question of whether it helps to promote glocal instead of global perspectives.

Illustration 1: Tasks for using “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” in the context of glocal education in foreign language teaching

Viewing-log

Task 1: Set in Malawi

To make topical one of the key 21st century challenges we face – *sustainability* –, we

are going to watch and talk about the feature film “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind”. In this unit, you will learn to adopt a *glocal perspective* for critically analyzing and interpreting a feature film. *Glocal* refers to the constant interplay between local and the global forces. The idea of *glocalization* hereby challenges the idea that globalization is a linear process of expansion that suppresses local perspectives.

Watch the trailer (<https://youtu.be/nPkr9HmgIG0>) to address the following tasks:

- A) Analyze the trailer. Which topics/issues are addressed in it? In which setting does the film take place? Visualize your results.
- B) Choose a topic, issue or an aspect of the setting of the feature film that you are particularly interested in. Do research on this topic; make sure to use viable sources and to keep track of the sources you use for your research. Add your findings to your visualization from task 1.A.
- C) After you have completed your research, write a text in which you speculate what the film might be about.

Task 2: Education

Before starting to watch the film ...

- A) Education is one of the most striking themes addressed by the film. Reflect on your own attitudes towards education. What does education mean to you? What do you associate with education? You can either write a reflective text or create a mind map.

Watch the film until 0:11:20.

- B) Watch the scene in which Trywell gives William his school uniform again (0:08:37-0:11:20).

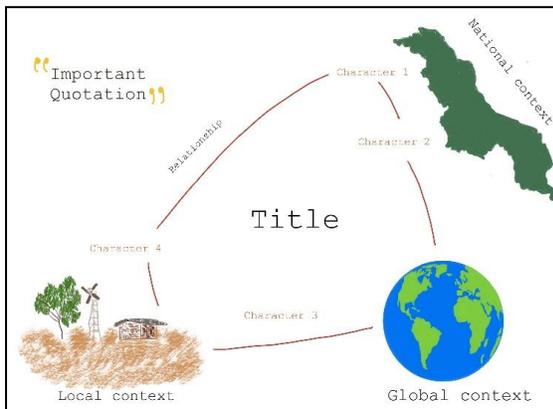
Option 1: Write an inner monologue explaining what William feels and thinks in the moment he was given the red trouser.

or

Option 2: Explain what education means to William and his family. Compare their view to your own attitudes.

Task 3: *Characters and the power structures they are subjected to*

While watching the film as a whole, focus on the characters and their relationships to each other. Create a sketch note that illustrates the characters' roles and their relationships to each other in the film. For this, consider the power relations on a local and global level that are shown in the film, i.e. how are the characters influenced by each other, by the local environment in Wimbe, on a national level by the government, or even beyond this by global contexts. How can they exercise agency? Here, you can find an example of how this can look like:



Extra task: Write a short reflection. How and in how far does looking at local, national and global levels help viewers analyze the film critically?

Task 4: *Free speech?*

Watch the scene in which the chief speaks up against the president again (0:46:30-

0:52:10). Analyze the scene. Especially focus on the function of language.

If you need help with this task, you can use the following questions as inspiration for your analysis:

- What does the chief criticize in his speech?
- What role does the government play in this scene? Are there any visual clues for this beside the film's narration?
- How are the characters portrayed in this scene? Look at costumes, postures and gestures, behavior, etc. as well as how they are filmed (perspective, camera angle, editing, etc.).
- Looking at the film as a whole, what do the policies of the government mean for the people in the local context? What does it mean for William, his family and the people in his village?
- In which situation do the characters speak English, in which situations do they use the local Bantu language Chichewa? To what effect?
- What are the power relations in this scene on local, national and global levels? How do these relate to the use of language? Consider the role of the government portrayed in the film for your answer, as well as a broader historic perspective that includes Malawi's colonial past. You can refer back to your findings from task 1.B and/or include additional research.

Task 5: *Harnessing the wind*

The film makes use of several symbols, most prominently the windmill that William builds. Interpret the symbolic meaning of the windmill in the context of local and global interrelations of the film.

For this, it will be helpful to watch the scene in which William tries to convince his father of using his bike in order to build the windmill again (1:21:00-1:24:50).

Extra: Can you identify other symbols? What is their meaning? Can you interpret their meaning from a glocal perspective as well?

Task 6: A glocal reference

- A) Closely watch the scene in which William fixes a radio for the local crowd (0:24:20-0:27:00) again. After William has fixed the radio, what can you hear? How does this message, conveyed through the radio –, as well as the crowd’s reaction – relate to a glocal interpretation of the film? Interpret the scene from a glocal standpoint.
- B) Watch the scene again in which Trywell asks an old friend for help (0:34:40-0:38:40). Explain the conversation from a glocal standpoint. How does the conversation relate to your findings from task A) and to your findings from the task “Free speech”?

Task 7: Can a film change the world?

Write a reflection on the question given in the task’s headline in the context of the feature film “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind”. You may address the following questions to find your answer:

- In how far does the feature film have potential to move the audience? In how far do you believe a film like “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” can trigger changes in peoples’ behavior (and your own) towards a more sustainable future?
- In how far does the film’s aesthetic design contribute to its appeal to

(Western or international) audiences?

- In how far does the glocal perspective help to understand the film? Is this viewpoint necessary to trigger a change in behavior?
- Are there better alternatives than the given film to trigger change for a more sustainable future?

Scenic interpretation

Task 8: A panel on sustainability

Imagine you are at a *Fridays for Future* event that makes topical how glocal narratives can help to promote a more sustainable future for the planet. During the event, the film “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” is introduced and a panel is held with its main stars.

Stage the panel with a moderator, actor and director Chiwetel Ejiofor, Maxwell Simba (William), Aïssa Maïga (Agnes), Lily Banda (Annie), and the real William Kamkwamba whose story served as inspiration for the film.

- *Group 1:* You are reporters at the panel. Think about questions for each star that relate to the main topic of the event, sustainability, and the film. Also refer to glocal interrelations portrayed in “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind”. Can the film help to promote (g)local instead of global narratives? Do additional research online to find interesting questions for each person taking part in the panel.

Sample question to Chiwetel Ejiofor: “As the director of the film, you have chosen to alter William’s narrative. While in his memoirs, the windmill William builds can produce electricity for the village, in your film the

windmill is able to water Wimbe's fields. What effect do you want to create with this change?"

- *Group 2:* You are preparing for the discussion from the perspective of the moderator and the stars. From the perspective of the person that you have chosen for yourself, prepare answers for possible questions that relate to the event's main topics, sustainability and glocalization. Do additional research online to learn more about the film as well as the person you will play during the panel.

You can use the following resources for starting your research:

- NPR interview with Chiwetel Ejiofor:
<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/28/699060631/chiwetel-ejiofors-directing-debut-takes-him-to-malawi-to-capture-the-wind>
- Focus on William:
<https://www.sandiego.edu/news/detail.php?focus=71319>
- Red carpet interview with the cast and producers:
<https://youtu.be/net2KGdt8y8>

After having staged the event, critically discuss and reflect your results in the light of the film. You can add the results of this discussion to your viewing log.

Scenic interpretation fosters learner's understanding of the local context shown in the film and can be especially effective if this context is unfamiliar to the audience (cf. Leonhardt & Viebrock, 2016). Finally, either identifying with characters in the film and/or reflecting on their actions in the viewing log from an analytical standpoint that acknowledges differences as well as the interconnectedness of local and global processes, will evoke the question of what the events shown have to do

with the individual context of the viewer. This directly leads to questions concerned with sustainability and connects learning with "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals such as the promotion of sustainable agriculture to prevent draughts, provide education and give all children the opportunity to shape their own future, and inspire responsible consumption with which environmental disasters and social inequality could be prevented.

Future Directions of Glocal Education Within Critical Foreign Language Education

Using the "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" as an example, we have shown how glocal education can enrich critical foreign language education. Both share many goals, e.g. discussing the interrelation of ecological, social, cultural, political and economic matters from a critical standpoint, and ultimately striving for a more democratic and sustainable future. Glocal education sets itself apart from concepts that apply a global perspective, as it does not only consider global processes superimposing local spaces and practices in a linear fashion. Applying this concept to "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind", the tasks we have developed enable learners to realize that even though Malawi may not be within their immediate proximity, their behavior and ways of life do have an influence on supposedly remote contexts (and vice versa). All learners are part of a global community that as a whole is responsible for environmental disasters and social injustice, and in turn can be responsible for a more sustainable future as well. By exploring films such as "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind", learners can be empowered as glocal citizens to "make a difference in the local and global community and

thus contribute to a peaceful and sustainable future” (Niemczyk, 2019, p. 16). Geared towards active change and taking responsibility, glocal education is a truly transformatory approach that inspires learners to be more conscious of their consumption choices, and more aware of the glocal impact they can have.

Our contribution has provided ideas on how glocal education can be implemented within foreign language education. It has and addressed the relative lack of material and task suggestions for film-based foreign language education through a glocal lens. Beyond this, it cannot be denied that the field still requires empirical substantiation, much like film-based foreign language education in general where only few studies have been conducted (e.g. Paran & Duncan, 2018). It would certainly be worthwhile to empirically examine the medium’s potential specifically for glocal education. As school-age learners are increasingly engaged in issues of ecological sustainability and social justice, feature films used in the context of glocal education may serve as a basis for classroom analysis, discussion and personal reflection and encourage them to look beyond issues relevant to and/or accessible through their own local context.

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