

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

Educational Insights – Florida, United States

*Interview by Marina Greb (MG) and Celine Gobernatz (CG)
featuring Prof. Dr. Edwidge Bryant (EB)*

PART 1

CG:

Education forms the way we understand and perceive history. But how are historical events taught and therefore commemorated in school? What does the government want us to remember, what is swept under the carpet? Are we teaching inclusivity, diversity, and equity? What can teachers do to not replicate narratives?

MG:

Hi, we are Marina and Celine, we study English for elementary and secondary school and with this podcast we want to inspire future educators to critically question the material in textbooks and to invest the effort to take a closer look at topics in order to be able to discuss them in a way that is true, age-appropriate and comprehensive.

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For *Monuments & Memory* we focused on the U.S. American holiday Thanksgiving and Native History. We explored through research, surveys, and interviews different perspectives on the holiday itself and as part of U.S. American and German curricula.

MG:

So for this podcast episode we are very happy to welcome Professor Dr. Edwidge Bryant. She is the chair of the education department at Flagler College, Florida, in Saint Augustine and in Tallahassee, where she has also served as the coordinator of English for Speakers of Other Languages. Prof. Bryant earned a Master of Arts in Education Administration, and a Doctorate in Applied Linguistics with an emphasis on bilingual and bicultural education from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. She also co-authored books for English for Speakers of Other Languages teaching (c.f. “Flagler Guest Professor Edwidge Crevecoeur-Bryant”). And today she will share with us some insides of the educational system in the U.S. and her thoughts on how Thanksgiving can and maybe should be implemented in teaching. So, thank you for being on our podcast!

EB:

You are very welcome! I am very excited to be here and thrilled to have been asked to be part of your podcast.

MG:

Yeah, we’re so happy that you said yes!

So, just to start off, we wanted to talk a little bit about the current restrictions and teaching guidelines, especially in conservative states like Georgia and Florida, that clearly influence education in terms of what and how to teach in schools and shapes the cultural consciousness of the students. And maybe you can share just some thoughts on the current development of education – maybe especially in Florida. And we are very interested in if there are ways to bypass restrictions and therefore address topics, affected topics

that might be restricted in a way that's inclusive, reflective, and critical – despite the restrictions. And maybe you have some strategies you might teach future teachers to deal with the current restrictions or... Yeah, we are just curious to hear your thoughts about that!

EB:

Oh, of course! First of all, again, thank you so much for the introduction and for having me here, excuse me, to share some of my views with you.

This is a very difficult and sensitive topic right now as you can imagine. Because it really depends on your perspective of how... how you interpret really what is going on. So, what I will share with you is actually some facts and then also my interpretation – my interpretations of those facts.

So, starting off with all of the restrictions that are happening, especially in, as you said, in states like Florida and also Texas, I believe that Florida is really taking the lead on a lot of the restrictions in terms of what teachers can teach in the classroom. So, for example, especially as it relates to African-American history, for example, that there are certain topics around slavery that teachers are no longer allowed to teach or present the whole notion of, well, the topic of slavery in a ... they ... I hate to use the word positive, because it's definitely not positive. So let me give you an example: very recently, as recently as last week, the discussion here in Florida was that teachers needed to say that there were some benefits to slavery.

MG:

Wow!

EB:

Eh yeah, benefits to slavery! And that some slaves actually acquired a lot of skills that they could use at a later time, like perhaps after they were no longer slaves. But they acquired here these skills and that there were benefits to it. This is the example that I'm talking about that I can't say that it's being presented in a positive way. Because even if you make those statements, that is definitely still not positive because it is not true. Part of it is, how do you ... how do you explain the torture and the treatment that people, those enslaved, received, and then present it in a way that is ... that it was beneficial that they learned these skills when you're being, you know, all day you're out in the sun, all day, your children, your babies are taken away from you, you're being sold – and then to present it in a way that is beneficial... What part of that was beneficial? And this again, there was an article on it and it happened as early as, the discussion, as early as last week! So, this is just to give you an example of what has happened and it's to me mind-boggling! And you know, textbooks ...

MG:

Unbelievable...

EB:

It's really unbelievable! To me, that was really the worst of it that, you know, teachers have to present it in such a way that children are not offended or scared or upset by, you know, by this – by the truth of what happened. This was a part of the human, of U.S. history, and it wasn't a great part of U.S. history. Yes, we have changed and learned, and we have grown from this experience. And this whole notion of presenting it in a way that is not the truth absolutely makes no sense. But textbooks had to be rewritten. Many of the textbooks that publishers used once upon a time in classrooms had to be rewritten, and they had to be reviewed by school boards and committees to determine whether or not the content of those textbooks were appropriate. And if they weren't, then the publishers were asked not to publish the books, the school districts would not purchase the books, depending on the content in the textbooks. And as a Haitian African-American person it just ... To me the attitude is one... it's... it's hurtful. Because this is, of course, part of my history that many of my fellow African-American friends and colleagues and teachers and

educators feel as though it's a direct attempt to basically erase us and what we have done and our history, which has been very important to us.

MG:

Yeah! So... so, there is... If I am a teacher in Florida, I have to present it like this and there's no other way in... »Okay, this is... this is what our textbook says, but actually I have prepared something for you...« and try to teach it in a different ways. So, this is probably not possible or are there...

EB:

It is not possible! It is... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off, but no it's not possible. As a teacher, I would have to teach exactly what I'm being told to teach and told to say. And this is what I am finding that many teachers are feeling is that they can't say what they want to say, and therefore have decided to either leave the state or quit education altogether. Because no, they would not be allowed – they could be fired. There can be other sanctions placed on them if they deviate from what's in the textbooks. If they decide to bring a book to ... give a book to a student – just to give the book to the student that would also involve some type of penalty for even doing that. A book that is considered to be banned from the curriculum, when it has information for example again regarding slavery, and some aspects of African-American history, not revised if you will. No, but there's another part, where there's a whole discussion around Rosa Parks, and why she was arrested, which was very different from the original explanation of Rosa Parks. So, as a teacher, if I would to give a student a book that described the events that occurred, my job could be absolutely on the line!

MG:

So, this is like – I don't know if this expression exists in English, but like – a devil's circle. The people who have good thoughts, and good intentions, and want to teach facts, they want to quit, or leave the state...

EB:

Right, and some of my colleagues have left. My colleagues, even at the University level. Many of them have left because it has... it's not only restricted to K-12. You also find that same level of restriction in higher ed as well, but that also depends on your university and what the university, president, and administrators what they're willing to fight or allow faculty to... to do. Every institution handles it very, very differently. Some are very supportive and allow faculty to say, whatever they want to say, do whatever they want to do because they really believe in providing the facts as they are. And especially at the college level, you are at a point where you are considered an academic thinker, so giving you the information and then allowing for you to decide how you want to interpret that information or carry out additional research on your own... But other universities are more restrictive, where they are very hesitant about allowing faculty to say or do whatever it is that they want to do. So, instead, they also put limitations. I've had faculty members, one in particular, who was absolutely in tears, when she was sharing with me that her own dissertation actually was reviewed and denied. Just because her topic was actually on areas of social justice and so forth. And she said, this is my life, this has been my life's work and now I can't... I can't pursue it anymore, because my institution will not support it. Because of the pressures that have been placed on them. Again, if you speak to perhaps someone else, they could very well have a different perspective. But for someone like me who is very involved, and has always been involved, in inclusion and culture and history this is very upsetting. When my colleagues, who have been in the state for a very long time, and have been champions of culture, and as I said, diversity and inclusion, and they had to leave the state, they're gone. And there are times that we can't even use the words diversity and inclusion. Not... when I say we, I do have a very supportive institution, which I'm very grateful for, but colleagues have said that they can't even use the words diversity and inclusion – and even in their PowerPoints, they had to remove just even the words.

MG:

I don't know what to say actually... it sounds so unreal to me. So, we know that this is happening but... yeah...

EB:

Oh, it's happening! Very much so. As I said, it is absolutely happening. And teachers... So, my pre-service teachers have asked – and I'm going to work on this – to bring in someone from the school district to speak to our students to inform them of what is it that they can and cannot say in the classroom. So that they are hearing it directly from the school district. So that it's not something that – yes as chair they do trust me – but sometimes it's good to hear it directly from the school district. So that they're very clear on what is it that they are able to say, and what they are not able to say. Because it is a reality! And we're experiencing it every day – more and more.

MG:

So, no ways to bypass the restrictions.

EB:

No, there is no way to bypass the restrictions. Again, in higher ed...

MG:

Maybe...

EB:

Perhaps, yes, because of the different institutions. But the state institutions are being very, very careful. The private ones initially would be... it was OK if they could do. But it's a... We're finding that the private institutions are being targeted as well. So, in K-12 classrooms very heavily monitored. Because for most, it only takes one student to go home and tell their parents that this is what they learned, this is what the teacher said, for them to... then that information be given to, let's say the principal or... And before you know it, the teacher can actually be out of their job as a result.

CG:

Do the parents support the institution's decision?

EB:

That's a great question in the sense that it depends on the parents and their viewpoints as well. If the parents are very much in line with what is going on in the teaching of – and some call it indoctrination, but it's really not, it's actual presenting of facts – it depends on which side or how you perceive this situation. There are parents who are very much against it and they welcome children, their children, getting the facts. And some parents have also left because some are saying that they want their children to grow up in environments where they welcome diversity, inclusion, equity! And they... and they don't want their children to be raised in areas or communities or schools where they cannot experience this really and allowed to be who they are. So, you have some parents also leaving. But at the same time – especially for Florida – you have the reverse, where many parents are choosing to come to the state as well. Because... property values have gone through the roof, because there is such demand for coming to Florida. So, it's really interesting watching the dynamics and seeing how the state itself is changing as a result. So, you have some people leaving the state, you have a lot of others, who are coming into the state. And then it depends on where you live in the state, whether how much of it is actually excepted – but yes, going back to the parents, some welcome the information and some don't. And some have protested against the books being removed from school libraries. But I'm not sure that the voices have been loud enough for real change to take place.

MG:

So, it's kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy then?

EB:

It seems like that, that's what's happening, but I think there are people trying to really voice their opinion. But I feel, as though there needs to be more, but there is that fear that you say too much and... or you react too much that... that your job could be in jeopardy. And that makes it pretty difficult to find another one, and you have to pay your bills, and you have real responsibilities, and you have children, and you have... and so I think there are times that people then become silenced – as a result. And then there is the other part that has taken place as well, where... The other is another bill that was introduced and signed by the current governor, is the »Don't say gay«-bill. So, yeah, that's the other part. So, we're not... we're not only dealing with the African-American history and what has happened as a result, but we are also dealing with those who are, for example again, the »Don't say gay«-bill, where you're not allowed to say gay in the classroom. If a student's parents are gay, you're... you can't say that. Then there's also the issues with our transgender children. That's also an issue. Issues related to that happening in the classroom as well.

MG:

It's hard to believe, but it's happening, yeah.

PART 2

MG:

So there are... there are many groups of people who are affected by that, as you said, African-Americans for sample, gay people, queer people in general... So, for this podcast series, we are especially interested in Native Americans and how to maybe teach Thanksgiving in school. I've kind of lost my hope, but I still ask the question: So, how can we address Thanksgiving in the school context? The holiday has a troubled history, to say the least. It has been utilized in very different ways throughout history, and it is surrounded by a patriotic myth of this so-called first Thanksgiving that is maybe just a tactical move to write the beginnings of American history, which are not at all the beginnings of this continent, in a way that is beneficial in the retro perspective. And it falsifies, it neglects the history of other population groups, and it of course sugarcoats the whole colonization of the continent to be peaceful and consensual.

But there are still some positive aspects about Thanksgiving – like a family gathering, enjoying good food, and practicing thankfulness – which is wonderful! So, it's also not very surprising that this topic might also be a little bit controversial – especially in teaching. So, our question is, how have you experienced the teaching of Thanksgiving? Or how have you yourself been learning about Thanksgiving? Or your children have been learning about Thanksgiving in school? And how do you celebrate the holiday yourself with your family?

EB:

I am more than happy to provide you with some information on that. And right now, I know this is a podcast, and your attendees will not be able to see the smile on my face, simply because I do feel that it's celebrated... Thanksgiving is celebrated in many different ways with different families. And for me, it has always been a very warm and inviting holiday. Simply because of the way that I perceive Thanksgiving in my sense of culture and inclusivity. So, for me, it's wonderful.

How it's going to be celebrated in school – I will share with you how I do. But first I think teachers are going to be very careful of how... how they discuss Thanksgiving in the classroom. In the past with my children and... growing up, it's been celebrated that there were Native Americans and there were people, especially you have the Pilgrims, and you have the Native Americans, and the Native Americans taught

them how to hunt and how to gather food and how to grow their food. So, when they had the first harvest they came together and had this wonderful meal together over three days of celebration. So, growing up, this is what my children in a... were taught. And they were times that they would make little headpieces that were similar to head gears for Native Americans. And they would color... and they would have to color turkeys and the Pilgrims and... So, it was... it was a lot of that being taught. But it was at the center of it, although it was never... I don't think it was stated that way, but at the center was a coming together of cultures. But now, I'm sure it will no longer be a coming together of cultures, simply because of where we are and the discussion around different cultures and so forth and diversity. So, I believe that the focus will then be more on families. You know, that your families come together. And perhaps it will be the families and some... what will be rewritten, however, it will be rewritten in the textbooks, it will have a quote on quote again, a more positive vent to it. But I believe that to leave our culture most likely what will be allowed to be stated will be around families. That's the time that your families come together, and everyone eats different foods, and you talk, and you laugh, and you have a wonderful time. That way we can bypass the whole notion of culture – which for me is the most wonderful part of the celebration of Thanksgiving. This part is about, as you would mention, Marina, just giving thanks for what we have. And families coming together but not just your own family, but just others. You know, it has always been for us... if we wanted to invite... anyone, it didn't have to be someone from a family per se. It's just making sure that people are not left alone, and that they have someplace to go and can participate and just be together to really give thanks for what we have. And for that, as I said, it's really beautiful. In the past, except for last year because I was in Germany on Thanksgiving, so I didn't celebrate it, or I was alone actually. It... well no, I shouldn't say that. Friends had invited us over to eat and it was really, really wonderful. It was beautiful, it was really, really beautiful, it was wonderful. But normally I cook – so I spend almost all day cooking and then my husband's family, because they live in Florida, too, they usually come over and eat with us. And then sometimes my children are able to travel, and they come as well. But usually, I cook – that's how I celebrate it – I cook all day. And of course, you want to serve a turkey – that's part of the celebration to have a turkey and to invite everyone and... and family members. And usually because I cook, sometimes my mother-in-law would say, is it okay, if so-and-so came? And sometimes I don't know the person, but the answer has always been: of course! You know, because it's time to allow everyone. Yeah!

MG:

Yeah. That reminds me a little bit of our Christmas. So, although we are, for example, no Christians at all, we have this family gathering and being together and seeing family members, you are maybe not seeing throughout the year. So, that's always a beautiful occasion to, yeah, enjoy time together and eat together, which is also important.

EB:

Very important – that's exactly right! And it's an... again, it's so beautiful, you know. And this is why I think I have such a difficult time with everything that is going on right now. And it's hard for me to understand especially around diversity and especially around inclusion – I don't understand sometimes how people can't understand how fulfilling life is when you open your arms and allow everyone to be part of your community or the community. You know it's... and I tell my students all the time... So, it's just... I feel so fulfilled when I learn more about Celine, okay? I learned more about Marina. I just feel as though as humans that when we find ways to connect with each other, if it just... it's such a wonderful thing! And when you allow people to be who they are, and you accept them for who they are, and the gifts that they can contribute to society for who they are, it doesn't matter! It doesn't matter the color of their skin. It doesn't matter. We all have so much to share with one another that makes this life more bearable. Because every... life is hard! You know, life is hard. And when we are allowed to open our hearts to each other, I know it may sound... some people may think it sounds... I don't know... but this is how I live my life!

And this is why, again, this is so hard for me to deal with. Why someone would want to exclude as opposed to include? You know, why? What's the benefit in that? Again, that's why it makes no sense to me that we cannot embrace everyone for what they can give, and what they can share, and what they can bring. Because when we do come together, it's just such a wonderful thing!

MG:

Enriching!

EB:

It's an enriching experience. And so, this is... this is very, very difficult for me – seeing what's happening. Very difficult! There are times that I can't even process it because it's... it's so unlike, you know, as human beings... So, to me, it feels very opposite to what we should be doing, which is including everyone. But I do hope things get better for us here – I really do.

MG:

We do, too!

EB:

Thank you! Whether or not they will, I... I don't know.

I don't want to end on a pessimistic note, but it just... people are just not... many are just not getting it. And I don't... I'm proud of my students at Flagler, who tend to be very, you know, open-minded and welcoming. Especially in teaching and pre-service teachers. It's tough! It's really tough!

CG:

Coming back to your question before, Marina: Do you think it is important to teach the historical background of Thanksgiving? Even though you probably won't have the opportunity in the future now?

EB:

Yes, I do. I do believe that it is important to teach the historical background. I think that it's important to provide context for students so that, they can understand it, and take it, and think about it, and so forth. But I do think that it needs to be grounded in context. Now, whether or not the question is... whether or not part of that historical background, history has been revised as well and presented in many different ways. And this is what they are arguing that oftentimes with history... it's provided in many different ways that it becomes the teacher's interpretation as opposed to actual facts. But there are ways of proving that things are actual facts. I mean, we can't deny that slavery, you know, happened. We can't say, oh no it's not a fact, but yeah, it is a fact, that it did occur. So, I do believe that for children it's best that information is... the facts are presented – the historical facts, so that they can understand why things have happened over the years and what the changes are. So, the context I do believe that it is important, yes!

CG:

I totally agree with you!

MG:

Yeah. Actually, it's kind of the responsibility of the teachers to... to unlearn everything that is developing now in Florida for example. So, the future generations have to unlearn again.

EB:

Yes, that's a very interesting way of putting it, absolutely. And then you do have young people, who are very much against it. Especially at the high school level where... they are saying, we want the truth, and

we can handle... we can handle the truth! Just give it to us! And... so that we don't have to... have to go back and unlearn things again and then re-learn things again. There are... some are saying, just give us... trust us enough to give us the truth! Because that's what we want! Yeah, young people are saying that, too!

MG:

So, that's a happy note!

EB:

Yes!

MG:

We have young people to say that! We have people like you, who stay strong and stay in those states, and... and raise their voice – which is so important!

EB:

Thank you!

MG:

Thank you for sharing your insights and your thoughts with us.

EB:

You're very welcome. You're welcome. And I hope, maybe the next time we have an opportunity to talk, maybe they'll be new developments, where those in positions of power – I'll put it that way – are able to see the real benefits of... definitely of diversity, the benefits of inclusion. That's what I'm hoping for. And the benefits of equity – for everyone, if that happens! Yeah.

MG:

That would be so beautiful.

EB:

Yes!

MG:

Thank you so much! That was wonderful!

EB:

Oh, you're very welcome. It was wonderful to see both of you and thank you for inviting me.

Educational Insights – Bavaria, Germany

by Marina Greb (MG) and Celine Gobernatz (CG)

CG:

Education forms the way we understand and perceive history. But how are historical events taught and therefore commemorated in school? What does the government want us to remember, what is swept under the carpet? Are we teaching inclusivity, diversity, and equity? What can teachers do to not replicate narratives?

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For *Monuments & Memory* we focused on the U.S. American holiday Thanksgiving and Native History. We explored through research, surveys, and interviews different perspectives on the holiday itself and as part of U.S. American and German curricula.

MG:

In this episode, we want to take a look at Thanksgiving in German, or more precisely in Bavarian English classes. And we ourselves can only vaguely remember our own school experience in this regard.

CG:

I know that we have talked about Native History in school, but I can't remember connecting this to Thanksgiving as a holiday, neither in elementary nor in secondary school.

MG:

Yes, I also remember that we did approach Native History in school, but I can't recall anything specific about it. So, it was certainly not anchored in the lessons in a sustainable way. Because of my great aunt, who was adopted by an Indigenous people in Canada with whom she worked, I was somewhat sensitized. But I only really got involved with the history of indigenous peoples – before and during colonization and up to the present day – during my studies. And that was only because I was more focused on the American studies in my English studies and chose certain courses there.

CG:

Yes! For both of us, it was not before certain university courses that we approach the topic of Thanksgiving in general and in a critical point of view specifically, which made us think about our educational background regarding this topic.

We wondered if this is a very personal experience or something that expands throughout schools. So, we started a survey and asked our fellow students. And we found out that it wasn't only us, but that most German students are neither aware of the myth of the so-called »first Thanksgiving« nor the historical background that comes with it. Some recalled »something with the Pilgrims« or »the American version of Erntedank« or the importance of eating a turkey. But most of them stated that they didn't learn anything about it in school.

The majority of American students know the sugar-coated story version of the first Thanksgiving. But for them, in fact, the celebration of the holiday itself revolves around thankfulness, family, and friends.

Of course, they had Thanksgiving covered in their classes, but often only recalled, as I said, the story of the »First Thanksgiving« and a lot of arts and crafts things in elementary schools.

MG:

Yeah. And I found one statement of a German student particularly interesting. It said that it would be not necessary to learn about and adapt American mainstream culture, but instead cultivate our own traditions. This made me think in two ways. First of all, intercultural learning, which we will talk about in more detail in a moment, is not about adapting the festivities of other cultures, but about simply getting to know them with an open and curious mind – the cultures and the festivities associated with them. And on the other hand, I asked myself – and this is also linked to intercultural learning – what relevance has this American holiday Thanksgiving at all? At least in German elementary schools – as I am studying to be an elementary school teacher and you, Celine, are studying to be a secondary school teacher.

CG:

Maybe that is a good transition to actually start about intercultural learning and what the Bavarian curriculum in fact has to say about it. Intercultural learning, but also Thanksgiving and/or Native history. What is it like for Bavarian elementary schools?

MG:

So, actually, one main aim of English lessons in Bavarian elementary schools is intercultural learning, so to generate sociocultural knowledge. And this is applied by teaching about holidays and events in English-speaking countries. But there is nothing like a list of holidays that need to be covered. So as a teacher, I can decide what I think is important. And in this way, the students are supposed to approach cultural differences in a very conscious, respectful, and appreciating manner. And clichés and stereotypes should be abolished or prevented. (c.f. ISB, »LehrplanPLUS Grundschule Fachprofil Englisch«) And I think this is a very wonderful idea!

CG:

Hm.

MG:

The only problem I see in this is the very vague wording. So, as a teacher, I can interpret this in different ways. Regarding Thanksgiving, which isn't covered in many elementary textbooks anyway, this could mean that teachers want to introduce their students to the holiday itself and how it is celebrated nowadays which would be definitely sociocultural knowledge. So, if Thanksgiving is covered, we always have the aspects of family, food, and thankfulness – turkeys do play a very important role. And I wonder if this is maybe just enough for elementary school. I am not quite sure about this, and this is definitely also depending on the learning group you're working with. And these aspects do not contain context, background, history or Native history, but we do have all the important elements of the holiday and how it is interpreted by most U.S. Americans these days.

But oftentimes, if it is covered, also the story of the famous first Thanksgiving is given but it then floats, very simplified, in a contextless space. So, the vocabulary is often »Pilgrims & Indians«, which should be debated anyway, and it always seems to be a very consensual story about helping each other out, a story of friendship. And this combined with some let's say interesting tasks for the students is basically lacking and sometimes harming Native perspectives. So, I saw exercises, which are probably designed with good intentions to also cover Native perspectives, but they look something like »we sing an Indian song and dance like an Indian«. Or »let's craft some head pieces with paper and plastic feathers« or »invent your own Indian signs and write the story on a sketched-out animal skin«. And this is definitely not what I do, or we do understand by teaching conscious, respectful and appreciative. This can actually lead to stereotypes.

And in a time when we discuss cultural appropriation and raise awareness of these issues, we must start with the little ones. I mean, how often are children dressed up as Natives at carnival time, or there are even theme parties with the title »Cowboys and Indians«, where you're supposed to do so? So, that alone would be a good reason for me to discuss at least some historical background even in elementary school, to raise awareness, to be able to explain...

So, I think it's very crucial if you want to give context, not only to dip in some aspects but to show the whole picture. And for elementary schools, this probably doesn't mean to extensively examine Native History, but at least to tell the students that Native History didn't begin in Plymouth and didn't end after a wonderful feast of friendship. And it also means to question elements of your given textbook that promote things like that and maybe find alternatives and additional material, which is actually not too hard to be found with a little bit of research.

CG:

So, for High Schools in Bavaria, the curriculum is more specific than for elementary schools. Students usually learn about Native History and Thanksgiving in grade 7 (c.f. ISB, "LehrplanPLUS Gymnasium 7 Fachlehrplan Englisch"). And with regard to these topics, the curriculum requires that students gain insight into the lives of young people in Northern America and therefore study their customs and celebrations. And here, the curriculum made specific reference to the treatment of Thanksgiving in the classroom. Additionally, it claims insights into the most important events in American history. Among other things, colonization and the Pilgrim Fathers are to be addressed here. In my personal experience, Native history is taught in nearly every English class, but Thanksgiving is a topic that many teachers do not pay much attention to or only use the material given in textbooks.

In addition, intercultural competencies play a major role in high school too, just as they do in elementary school. Through the lessons, the students should have a basic historical knowledge of the United States as well as of the lifeworld of their peers there. This can be implemented in most cases. However, based on their knowledge of basic cultural similarities and differences, they should additionally understand other ways of life and increasingly come to terms with their own attitudes as well. In this aspect, the problem arises that understanding depends very much on what they have been taught in school. And therefore, it is really important that teachers do research about the real history, in terms of Thanksgiving as well as in Native history, and design appropriate material for their students to guarantee intercultural understanding. Because what students learn in English class influences how they later behave toward Natives, but also toward the American population in general.

MG:

Hm, yeah. So this is why we did a survey among Bavarian teachers from different school types to find out about their perspectives and their opinions on how Native History and especially Thanksgiving is covered in the textbooks they use. Of course, regarding the school type and personal points of view we got very different answers, but we are happy to see that the topic gained more awareness in recent years – not at least due to the new Bavarian curriculum – and that teachers at least tend to use additional materials to provoke critical thinking. And some teachers even do focus on the intercultural learning or the historical background and not so much – in some phases of their teaching – on language teaching or language learning.

CG:

However, when we look at the existing textbooks and teaching materials on teacher web platforms, we think that critical thinking and providing an historical background is still at the starting point as it is most of the time only scratching the surface. Teachers seem to see this in a similar way. Textbooks focus on the first Thanksgiving and try to include the Native perspective, but they fail to give the whole picture of the story.

MG:

Yeah, and I saw an interview with David Silverman (Silverman), who is the author of the book *This Land is Their Land*, who says the holiday Thanksgiving doesn't necessarily have to be connected to the so-called first Thanksgiving, but if the story is told, it needs to be true (c.f. St. Bart's, 39:12-39:217)! And he also – and I guess this is a very important aspect – says, Thanksgiving is the focal point for considering the native role in the past of the U.S. (c.f. St. Bart's, 36:14-36:20). So, in our opinion, teaching should go beyond the content given in textbooks and also consider questions like: Was the famous Thanksgiving in Plymouth really the first one? Is the story the way we teach it maybe mystified? And for what reason?

CG:

Yes, or something like: Can we find Native perspectives instead of inventing diary passages of the so-called pilgrims? Have there been encounters before and after? Why was this period a rather peaceful one? What happened after?

MG:

Exactly. And I am not talking for elementary school or elementary teaching here, but in secondary schools, we should also talk about genocide? Or what about »kill the Indian, save the man«? The Indian removal? Reservation schools? Things like that.

CG:

Absolutely... or: Since when is Thanksgiving officially a holiday and why? What about the Red Power Movement?

And this list could go on and on.

MG:

Yeah, it could! And of course, we are aware of the limited time teachers have for each topic they are supposed to approach. And we are also aware that different school types need different approaches to difficult topics like that. But we think it is tremendously important that if you talk about Thanksgiving in school and the encounter of the European and Native people, you can't just tell a story about a wonderful feast, because it is just wrong to sugarcoat history.

CG:

Yes, and this is why we put together a list which you can find on this website. This list includes ready-to-teach materials, historical sources, interviews, newspaper articles, book lists, materials provided by the Native Americans, and many more. We hope to inspire teachers and future teachers to dig deeper into Native history and try to find ways to teach respectfully, appreciative, and thoughtful. Topics like these deserve awareness and honest acknowledgment.

MG:

Yes, and for more insights, you can also listen to our interview with Prof. Dr. Edwidge Bryant, with whom we talked about current educational restrictions in the U.S..

So, thank you for listening!