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## Foreign language teaching and intercultural citizenship

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### ABSTRACT

In the 'cultural turn' which has taken place in recent decades – in theory if not yet in practice – the crucial question is 'What should a language teacher's aims be?' This will be the main focus of this paper. There are however other questions which are frequently raised in the new context, questions about the relationships among 'language', 'identity' and 'culture'. If language learning influences identity or even creates new identities, should this be one of the aims of teaching? At the same time it is important to place foreign language teaching in the wider context of all language teaching: national languages, heritage languages, and minority languages. I will attempt to take these other factors into account while addressing the main issue of teaching aims.

Teachers' aims should be both functional and educational. Language teaching of all kinds – but my main concern will be foreign language teaching as practiced in general education – should develop competence for communication and interaction whilst stimulating critical thinking and action in the world. In order to illustrate this, I will turn to some recent work which realises new theory in practice and combines the aims of language education and education for citizenship in the concept of intercultural citizenship.

**Keywords:** cultural turn; language teaching aims; education; citizenship

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## Introduction

Education is often seen as preparation, as preparation for something else, something later. Examinations are the gateway to that something else, to the next stage in education, to entry into the world of work, to university or to a job. Language teaching is likewise seen as preparation and all the more so since it has shifted its focus from the teaching of language and the study of language as system, to the facilitating of learning to communicate and the notion of communicative language teaching. Languages in this view are learnt for later, 'when you go to X country' or 'when you meet an X-speaking person'.

The emphasis on learning a language for communication and use in the world outside education, particularly the world of work, is often thought of as a new phenomenon, especially since the invention of the concept of 'human capital' with which it is easier to describe the relationship of education to the development of the economy of a country. 'Education is our best economic policy' was one of Tony Blair's mantras about education. It is not a new idea however, as can be seen from an enquiry held in Britain in the 19th century:

We received at our public courts abundant and convincing evidence of the interest which is widely felt by intelligent men of all ranks and professions in the promotion of these studies (i.e. modern languages).

Gentlemen engaged in various branches of commerce and manufactures gave their testimony to the increasing importance, in relation to their pursuits, of a familiar acquaintance with modern languages and particularly with French and German.

They also expressed their conviction that such knowledge should embrace not merely the power of reading and translating these languages, but speaking and writing them correctly and with ease. (Royal Commission, 1858, p.203)

The question 'What should a language teacher's aims be?' has thus been reviewed and revised from the earliest days of foreign or modern language teaching in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And, from the perspective I have described so far, the answer appears to be simple enough: the language teacher should be preparing his/her learners to use the language in the future, either a future in further education, which itself will lead to the world of work, or more directly and immediately, for the world of work itself, to take their place in 'the economy'.

Furthermore it goes without saying that the economy in question is national. When Tony Blair says 'our' economic policy, he does not need to specify that he is thinking in national terms. He was after all the prime minister of 'our' country, talking about 'our' education system, for 'our' children and young people. He was simply reinforcing the 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) which is all around us, and where education plays a national role. It is a peculiarity of British education history that we did not introduce a 'national curriculum', as it is tellingly called, until the 1990s, whereas most countries formalised the national role of education many decades earlier. Irrespective of the date or origin, what is common to all education systems is that they are expected to serve 'our' economy and, second, that they are expected to create and maintain 'our' national identity. There are many examples of policy statements which embody the national role of education. They are easy to find whenever new countries emerge and make explicit statements about how education should form 'good citizens'. Here are two examples:

Norwegian curriculum:

By learning (foreign) languages, pupils have opportunity to become familiar with other cultures. Such insight provides the basis for respect and increased tolerance, and contributes to other ways of thinking and broadens pupils' understanding of their own cultural belonging. In this way pupils' own identity is strengthened.

(<http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/dav/78FB8D6918.PDF>- Jan 2005)

The 2008 curricular innovation in ELT in the Province of Buenos Aires stated as one aim "the strengthening of their [the children's] own cultural identity by enabling the processes of social integration" (Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008, p.321).

(Porto & Barbioni, 2012, p. 121)

In older countries, the purposes more often remain implicit but it is now expected that French children should learn the national anthem at school, and children in the USA continue to make their daily pledge to the flag. We await the day when the present Conservative Minister of Education for England decrees that children should learn to sing 'God save the Queen'.

### **Foreign language teaching and nationalism**

In the midst of all this nationalism, the role of foreign language teaching in any national curriculum is paradoxical. On the one hand it is part of national education, on the other hand it has the potential to turn learners' attention to other countries and other understandings of what 'our' means. 'Our' cannot be simply translated as 'notre' (French) or 'unser' (German) etc. for each apparent translation is full of connotations. Furthermore, since the early days of research on motivation in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), it has been argued that learners who identify with the speakers of the language they are learning will be more successful: 'integrative motivation'. Even more recent theories of learning suggest that learners will be successful if they embrace the idea of themselves as speakers of the foreign language: 'the ideal L2 self' (Dörnyei, 2009). Yet, as we saw in Norway and Argentina, despite the potential for looking outwards, the role of foreign language teaching in looking inwards and strengthening national identity is not in doubt.

If we now return to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the demands for languages for commerce, there is also in the Royal Commission report a hint at another dimension of language teaching – the notion of a liberal education:

We concur with (gentlemen belonging to various professions) in thinking that the motives for such a change are to be found, not only in the special wants, important as these certainly are, incident to industrial pursuits, but in the very nature and essential requirements of a modern and liberal education. (Royal Commission, 1858, p. 203)

That notion of liberal education survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but is in danger of being destroyed in the 21<sup>st</sup> and we can ask ourselves once again what language teachers aims are, or have become, in the context of education as economic policy and in the creation of national identity.

For those who teach in schools and vocational education, the aims of those 19<sup>th</sup> century businessmen have not changed, and communicative language teaching has in the meantime given them the means of reaching their ends. For those who teach in higher education, the aims have changed from being focused exclusively on liberal education to now include the economic or instrumental aims, and the combination of older methods in the study of language, or philology, together with communicative language teaching. This is what *is* the case, this is the *status quo*.

Yet this does not answer the question about what *should* be the case. What language teachers aims *should* be. The problem is that you cannot get an 'ought' from an 'is' although this gap in the logic has been ignored by those who say that education ought to or should serve the economy, or education ought to or should create a national identity. In proposing an 'ought' for language teachers, I do so in full recognition of the need to ground my proposal in values, rather than in a description of what is the case.

### **A new communication situation?**

Before doing so, let us consider communication – the current, dominant focus of language teaching – and ask ourselves if the much-discussed modern media and social media in particular have created a new condition in which new aims might be desirable. Has the world changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the concerns of those men of commerce? Is the 21<sup>st</sup> century so different that the dominance of 'communication' in language teaching is justified?

I recently conducted an informal survey among people who teach languages and intercultural communication and are part of a network of teachers and researchers (<http://cultnetworld.wordpress.com/>), asking them to talk to their students. Here is one response from Korea:

(...) the feedback of the majority (though not all) of my students who participated in the 'citizenship education' exchange with (...) the US last semester. The students' comments and written responses suggested this was often their first opportunity to communicate with non-Koreans using the internet (most of them use SMS and the internet constantly, from their phones - but in Korean and with other Koreans). (Cathy Peck, 2013)

Others agreed that unless their students had had some previous experience of study abroad or of being involved in a class-to-class exchange, they did not have contacts outside their close circle of friends. This is what a colleague in Italy said:

Regarding your question about whether 15-20 year olds are connected to people all over the world, in our experience this is not so - most teenagers we are familiar with use social networks to talk to their local friends. In Ana's doctoral research, the informants had practically no foreign friends before they did their Erasmus programme. It is true that, during study abroad, they all had to start writing and speaking in other languages with their new contacts (mostly other Erasmus). But we also need to remember that only about 2% of students in Europe study abroad, and this reflects the percentage of Europeans who move to another European country to work - leaving the other 98% at home... food for thought!

Food for thought indeed! Remember that these are students of language and communication and if international communication is not commonplace for them, then I suspect that it will be less so among their peers who work in shops and offices, in garages and factories. As one person put it:

communication in foreign languages in Ukraine with other parts of the world is an experience limited to an educated elite (...)

This was an informal survey but the warning is clear that we should not take anything for granted. Our students may not in fact know people beyond their national frontiers and even their local community.

The concept of community is important too. It is often referred to by linguists who write about language communities or communities of speakers, where the emphasis is on native language communities. I want to argue that it *should* be the case that all teachers should encourage learners to engage with a wider range of communities. This is based upon a belief – and I use the word deliberately since my ‘should’ has to be based on values – that nationalism and identification with a national community should be tempered and complemented, if not replaced, by identification with internationalism and international communities. Secondly, I believe that language teachers have a major role in this process because of their paradoxical position of being in a national education system but turned outwards to other ways of thinking, to other cultures. My reasons are multiple but they include the damage that nationalism – and its manifestation in patriotism and jingoism – has done from the 19th century onwards throughout the world, not least in the region where this conference took place.

### **An alternative to nationalism in education**

Nationalism managed to take control of education, and in the worst cases, in an extreme but telling statement, this is described by Kedourie as follows:

in nationalist theory (...) the purpose of education is not to transmit knowledge, traditional wisdom (...) its purpose rather is wholly political, to **bend the will of the young to the will of the nation**. Schools are instruments of state policy, like the army, the police, and the exchequer. (Kedourie, 1966, p. 84 – emphasis added)

The alternative to this is internationalism. What internationalism means in detail is a topic for another day but let me give a simple definition of the kind of internationalism I am speaking about, a ‘liberal internationalism’ – and here there are links with liberal education:

a generally optimistic approach based upon the belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals can, through greater interaction and co-operation, **evolve towards common purposes**, chief among these would be peace and prosperity. (Halliday, 1988, p. 192– emphasis added)

The evolution towards common purposes which is described here, is not inevitable and educationists have a key role to play in encouraging young people to engage in the process, especially language teachers.

Let me give an example from current work which involves a network of teachers in secondary schools and higher education in several countries and in combinations of bilateral and multilateral projects. The example I give is taken from a project designed by university teachers in Argentina and the United Kingdom. There are 50 Argentinean university students of English with a high level

of competence (CEFR C1) and 50 UK students of Spanish doing 'honours' courses, i.e. they too are at an advanced level of language competence. They address the sensitive topic of the Malvinas/Falklands War, a topic which has become part of contemporary discussion again in the two countries since 2012 was the 30th anniversary of that event.

The students researched the conflict and talked to each other both synchronously and diachronically using the Internet, with a strong focus on developing an interactive and respectful understanding of the event and the need for co-operative conflict resolution. Among other things they created powerpoints about the war, interviewed Argentinean and British war veterans, and created collaboratively an advertisement to show the potential for contact and reconciliation. All of these things could be done and were done in a foreign language classroom. However what is important is that they also took action in the world -- bringing into the foreign language classroom the principles of citizenship education (Byram, 2008) -- by creating blogs and Facebook pages and noting and responding to reactions to these. They also produced leaflets presenting the notion of reconciliation which they then distributed in the centre of their city. The Argentinean students also went on to teach a special class on the topic in an English-language school and, in cooperation with an NGO, in a class in a poor neighbourhood of their city. This is ongoing (see appendix). Other projects in the network are at earlier stages of development but all are trying to follow the basic principles of combining foreign-language education with citizenship education.

This is work in progress and as yet there are no research results from an evaluation, but I want to speculate about the processes here in order to return to some of the questions and concepts I mentioned earlier.

What I hope is happening here is the creation of an international community i.e. a group of people with citizenship in two countries and, probably, identification with two nations, who come together as one community to carry out a common task. This is a 'community' in Tönnies' sense:

Die menschlichen Willen stehen in vielfachen Beziehungen zu einander; jede solche Beziehung ist eine gegenseitige Wirkung (...) Jedes solches Verhältniss stellt Einheit in der Mehrheit oder Mehrheit in der Einheit dar. Es besteht aus Förderungen, Erleichterungen, Leistungen, welche hinüber und herüber gehen, und als Ausdrücke der Willen und ihrer Kräfte betrachtet werden. (...) Das Verhältniss selber, und also die Verbindung wird entweder als reales und organisches Leben begriffen — dies ist das Wesen der Gemeinschaft, (...).(Tönnies, 1887, Para 1)

The wills of human beings interact in many different ways. Every such relationship is reciprocal (...). Every relationship of this kind involves some kind of balance between unity and diversity. This consists of mutual encouragement and the sharing of burdens and achievements, which can be seen as expressions of people's energies and wills. (...) the relationship itself, and the social bond that stems from it, may be conceived (...) as having real organic life, and that is the essence of *community*. (ibid)

What I hope is happening – and it remains to be seen – is an identification with this community, perhaps only a temporary identification, but an experience which can be compared and contrasted with identification with the national community.

### **Theory of intercultural citizenship**

There is of course a theory behind this practice. All practice is theory driven, but much of it is not systematic theory; people often start with practice in which the theory is implicit. The practice here

on the contrary started from theory, a theory of intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008), which combines the aims of language teaching with the aims of citizenship education, but modifies and improves both. Of course by saying 'improves' I imply a specific direction, a specific ought or should.

Put briefly, the aims of teaching languages for intercultural competence include: linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence in language, combined with intercultural competences in the discovery, analysis, comparison and critique of cultures. That is my definition of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). What is important here is the comparative analysis and critique of cultures, both the cultures (in the plural) of the learners and the cultures (in the plural) of speakers of the language being learnt. Notice I did not say native speakers, a point to which I will return later.

Turning to citizenship education, again to be brief, its aims include moral or ethical education, education in political literacy, and most importantly, for my purposes here, education leading to action in the world, and action which takes place now, not in the future (e.g. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998).

The strengths of education for intercultural competence in a foreign language lie in the critical comparative analysis of 'other' cultures and 'ours'. The weakness is the lack of focus on action in the world. The weaknesses of citizenship education are its lack of criticality of 'our' cultures and the limitation to a national perspective, because citizenship education attempts to educate 'good citizens' and good citizens do not 'rock the boat', they conform. On the other hand, the strengths of citizenship education are its focus on action in the world, and on action which takes place *now*. The purpose of the project I have showed is to combine the strengths of each and to overcome their weaknesses.

What we saw in the example is a combination of criticality with action, criticality which focuses on 'our' cultures and 'theirs', and action which takes place now.

I think this theory and the examples are relevant not only in action in the social world of the community but also in the world of work, where international *community* and *co-operation* are alternative views to *competition* among national companies. The students in Argentina and England will, I hope, be able to transfer their experience to other situations.

Finally the example might help to offer an answer to the other major question in current developments: 'Whose culture should teachers teach and students learn?'. I do not know if the students in the example are among those who, before the project, had frequent contact with people in other countries with the modern media but they have now had that experience in an ordered, systematic educational environment. In doing so, they created a community and also the culture of that community i.e. the shared values of the group and the shared actions they undertook. At the same time they discovered something about the values and perspectives of some speakers of the language they are learning. They happened to be native speakers, but students are using English as a lingua franca to discover the cultures of non-Anglophone countries. It does not really matter. It does not matter which cultures they discover because the main point is to have experience, and to acquire skills and attitudes for exploring the culture of any social group they meet, whether in the world of work or leisure or of education or of common political action. Furthermore, what they have learned through comparison is as much about their own cultures and identities, and how these can be challenged and questioned, and not only 'strengthened' as the Norwegian curriculum said. It is not a matter of what culture to learn or to learn about, but which cultures to explore in addition

to our own -- and the answer is: any culture of any social group with which learners can be encouraged to interact.

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## Appendix

### **The Malvinas/Falklands War: An opportunity for citizenship education in the foreign language classroom in Argentina and the UK**

Melina Porto, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET

Leticia Yulita, University of East Anglia, UK.

The purpose of this project is to facilitate intercultural and citizenship experience in the foreign language classroom for 100 students in Argentina and the UK. Using a comparative methodology, the project addresses the Malvinas/Falklands war fought between Argentina and the UK in 1982. It challenges students to analyse and understand the power of the media in constructing stereotypical images of otherness, and how this influences one's thinking and behavior towards Others.

The classroom context in Argentina is a university setting; 50 future teachers and/or translators of English in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of undergraduate studies at the National University of La Plata. This is a prestigious, state, access-for-all university in a developing country. The age range is 18-22. English is a foreign language in Argentina and these students have level C1 in the *Common European Framework of Reference*. The classroom context in the UK is also a university setting; 50 first-year undergraduates undertaking Spanish Honors Language degree courses, aged 18-21, for whom Spanish is a foreign language.

The participants have researched the conflict and have engaged in online communication using a wiki and Elluminate live (asynchronous and synchronic online communication respectively) for two months. They have interacted with Others on the basis of values of respect, mutual understanding, social justice and openness, allowing Others to express their viewpoints, avoiding hostility and confrontation and resolving conflict cooperatively when necessary. They have suspended the perspectives created by their national identity and have acquired a temporary cooperative international identity and perspective. For instance, they have created posters and PPTs about the war, they have interviewed an Argentine war veteran and an English one, and they have collaboratively planned and created an advertisement whose ultimate and general aim was to reflect a point of contact and reconciliation between the Argentine and the English. Finally, they have

transferred knowledge of their own context and culture to Others by engaging in civic participation locally. For instance, some groups have created blogs and facebook pages and are currently registering reactions; others have created awareness-raising leaflets about the war and have distributed them in the city center of La Plata in Argentina; others have taught a special class about the conflict in a local English language school; and others have done the same in a very poor neighborhood in the context of an NGO called 'Un techo para mi país' (an NGO that teaches adults to read and write).

### **Ads for reconciliation between the Argentine and the English (done in collaboration between students in Argentina and in the UK)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0twTampTno&feature=youtu.be>

<http://www.glogster.com/sofigeido/malvinas-ad/g-6l5ivb3voi3c1ssvleap1a0>

<http://youtu.be/cIWCcXHMUsW>

<http://thefalklandsmalvinasproject.blogspot.com.ar/search/label/Home>

### **Action in the community (by Argentine students in the city of La Plata)**

- 1) **In an ONG called 'Un techo para mi país'**

#### **Video for the**

**class:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4fDSJ7yLrw&feature=youtu.be>

**Final video of the encounter:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx3z6FTknyY>

- 2) **Blogspot**

<http://proyectedomalvinas.blogspot.com.ar/>

- 3) **Flyer**

We designed a flyer in Glogster and we handed them in the streets of La Plata.

Here's the link [http://www.glogster.com/antomon/malvinas/g-6l5cocsdp21823pfijd5ea0?fb\\_action\\_ids=4526447451862&fb\\_action\\_types=og.likes&fb\\_source=aggregation&fb\\_aggregation\\_id=246965925417366](http://www.glogster.com/antomon/malvinas/g-6l5cocsdp21823pfijd5ea0?fb_action_ids=4526447451862&fb_action_types=og.likes&fb_source=aggregation&fb_aggregation_id=246965925417366)

- 4) **A lesson in an English school. One of the students is 100 years old.**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvXTV5ZwQiY&feature=youtu.be>