From Instrumentalism to Humanistic Education: The Changing Purposes of Language Teaching

Michael Byram
Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria
Corresponding author's email: m.s.byram@durham.ac.uk

Abstract

This article makes an argument that language teachers should (re)consider their purposes and that humanistic purposes are as significant as instrumental ones. It demonstrates that this perspective is increasingly present in policy documents internationally. It also illustrates the possibility of realising such purposes by describing a teaching project developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was based on three pedagogies: a pedagogy of discomfort, an arts-based pedagogy, and a pedagogy of intercultural (communicative) competence. The third of these is then explained by introducing recent work at the Council of Europe on a Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, which includes democratic values. Values, it is argued in this Framework, should be taught, and this raises questions about whose values and whether there are universal values. The article then analyses the possible positions a teacher might take with respect to encouraging their students to critique the values of others and their own, and suggests that "critical cultural awareness" is perhaps the optimal position. The implications, if this argument is accepted, are significant with respect to pedagogy, to teachers' definitions of their professional identity, and to the need for further experimentation at all levels of education.

In this article, based on a keynote lecture in September 2023[1], I want to make an argument that foreign language educators have an opportunity and perhaps a duty to develop not only their learners' linguistic and communication skills but also their knowledge and critical understanding of themselves and others, and especially of their values. I am aware that the argument is not original, and it was present in the rationale for the conference, but I want to draw out some of the implications for teachers and the positions they may take when teaching values.

Let me begin with a quotation from the Dean's Welcome to the Faculty of Liberal Arts of Thammasat University:

> In this rapidly changing world and disruption, the survivors are those with human skills that technology cannot easily imitate or replace.
> It takes the skills to *understand oneself, others, the world, and society* [emphasis added].
> It takes the skills to link the past, present, and future, and to *communicate and work with people in this world* [emphasis added] through language uses and respect the difference.
> (Sripicharn, n.d., Dean's message section)

The emphasis on understanding and the ability to work and communicate with people, signals a move away from an exclusive focus on the skills of communication. Indeed, I think that contemporary technology will soon allow us to speak in language A into our telephone and be heard in language B by someone standing opposite us, and that it will not be necessary to learn the transactional language and language for exchange of information and basic services which has dominated much Communicative Language Teaching. On the other hand, "to understand oneself and others' world and society" requires much more than communication skills. There is, implicit in the Dean's Welcome, an enriched view of language learning which I would describe as intercultural *and* humanistic.

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[1] Diversities and Voices in Language Education and Thai Studies. 12-13th September, Bangkok.

Humanistic Language Teaching

"Humanistic" is not a new word in language teaching (Grundy, 2013; Shirkhani & Ardeshir 2013). It is associated with the name of Earl Stevick and others who emphasised that language learning is a matter not only of cognitive, intellectual effort but also of affective, emotional commitment. However, I am using it in a different way, namely, to discuss the *purposes* of language teaching, rather than the methodological approaches taken to language teaching and the effort needed in language learning, although the two are ultimately linked in practice.

The emphasis on humanistic purposes is increasingly present in policy documents and curriculum guidelines. Let me take two examples from strikingly similar documents from vastly different countries.

In China, the College English curriculum, or the English that all students must learn in Chinese universities - not just the English majors - refers to *instrumental* reasons for learning English. It will be useful for students of any subject to be able to use English in their profession and career. However, this is coupled with "humanistic quality education":

> College English curriculum is not only a basic language course, but also a quality-oriented education course to broaden knowledge and understand world culture, *both instrumental and humanistic* [emphasis added]… The integration of *humanistic quality education* into college English teaching can *cultivate students' sense of social responsibility* [emphasis added] through subtle influence.
>
> (Li, 2020, p. 117)

The reference to social responsibility is important when I come to the notion of community engagement below.

In Norway, there is a similar vocabulary set to that used in China, with the use of "education" and "humanistic":

> Foreign languages are both an *educational subject and a humanistic subject* [emphasis added] … Competences in language and culture shall give the individual the possibility to understand, to 'live into' and value other cultures' social life and life at work, their modes and conditions of living, their way of thinking, their history, art and literature.
>
> The area of study (languages) can also contribute to developing interest and tolerance, *develop insight in one's own conditions of life and own identity* [emphasis added], and contribute to a joy in reading, creativity, experience and personal development.
>
> (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, n.d., Curriculum in foreign languages section)

In both cases, there is no question of reversing the emphasis on communication skills, but of enriching them with other dimensions of human learning and interaction.

There is another important point that I take from the Norwegian curriculum, for it links language teaching to democratic citizenship:

> Good competence in languages will also lay the ground for participation in activities which *build democracy beyond country borders* [emphasis added] and differences in culture.
>
> (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, n.d., Curriculum in foreign languages section)

The implication in this statement is that, usually, democratic participation is thought of in terms of being a member of the community of one's own country, the "imagined community" analysed by Anderson (1983). The Norwegian document invites us to think of democratic communities beyond the limitations of the borders of a country, and this leads us to consider more closely the notion of "community".

Community Engagement and COVID-19

Learners and teachers live as members of many communities or social groups. For example, there is the community of the university, the local community whether small or large, a village or a city, the national community as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), and the world beyond the boundaries of the state, the world community,

which is also an imagined community. We also live in our family communities in our leisure communities, and in our work communities. That students should, during their course of their university studies, be engaged with and contribute to the life of their communities has been defined and developed as "service learning" (e.g., Furco & Billig, 2002; Furco, 2003), and "intercultural service learning" has been developed as a particular branch of service learning with its own theory and practice (Rauschert & Byram, 2017).

The significance of this humanistic, community-oriented work became all the more prominent during the period of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The rationale for the aforementioned conference makes this explicit:

> The outbreak of coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) has brought about rapid changes and affected the world population in a multitude of dimensions in society. Among those dimensions are foreign language teaching and learning and intercultural communication.

To illustrate this, I turn to a project developed during the COVID-19 period that stimulated opportunities for change and led to the operationalisation of some of the theories and concepts that I have outlined so far.

The project[2] was planned and designed in April and May 2020, and was carried out during a four-week virtual exchange in June 2020 between university students from Universidad Nacional de La Plata in Argentina and the University of Maryland Baltimore County in the USA. The purpose was formulated as 'Can the exploration of trauma and suffering associated with Covid-19 using arts-based methods and pedagogies of discomfort become a site of personal and social transformation?' This formulation became the research question for the evaluation of its effects. Full processes of ethical clearance were followed as required in each university, and students, who volunteered to be involved in the project, were asked to sign informed consent forms and to release their documents for use in academic articles.

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[2] This account is closely based on Porto, Golubeva and Byram (2021).

There were 15 second-year students in Argentina, where the official language is Spanish and English is taught as a foreign language. They were enrolled in an English language course that was part of a five-year programme for future teachers and/or translators. They were aged 18-22 and had a B2/C1 level of English according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001). Participants in the United States were 10 students, aged 18-26, enrolled in various undergraduate programmes (Biological Sciences, Business Technology Administration, Health Administration and Policy, Information Systems, Media and Communication Studies, and Psychology), and taking an "Introduction to Intercultural Communication" course. They were all USA nationals, some first-generation, with different cultural, language, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Before starting the project, the students in both countries had been under lockdown for more than two months, and university teaching had become remote. The situation in the United States was significantly affected by the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and thus, in addition to the stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and general healthcare and economic uncertainty, another crisis arose, a crisis driven by social polarization, racism, and prejudice. Very soon, COVID-19 became politicized and used by many for their economic, political power gains. The effects on students of these various pressures were expected to be substantial.

There were six stages in the project. The students began the first week by completing a pre-project questionnaire (*baseline stage*) in which they were asked about their feelings and reactions to the current situation. They then carried out individual research and collected some examples of how the theme of the pandemic had been approached artistically in their country (*research stage*). The third stage comprised students sharing their findings and corpora of data and engaging in discussions and reflections in small groups. As a result of this, they jointly created an artwork accompanied by a report of the group's work as a whole (*awareness raising stage*).

In week 2, the students were put in mixed Argentine/USA groups, shared their creations, and discussed their discomforting content and

associated emotions (*dialogue stage*). In the following two weeks, and in their mixed groups, the students collaboratively designed an arts-based creation intended to channel personal feelings and emotions that would contribute to their societies and the global community. They also composed an artistic statement that described their process of creation, using English as lingua franca. They were then asked to seek an outlet for their artwork; in other words, to go beyond the virtual classroom (via their social networks, blogs, etc.) and carry out an awareness-raising campaign about the emotional dangers of the pandemic, following which they wrote a civic/social action statement about their experience (*action stage*). Here are some examples of their artwork (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Examples of the students' artwork

Some groups chose to produce videos. One group described its product as follows:

> **A new way of living**
> The main topic of our artefact was to show how the world was changing through this pandemic moment. All the actions seen in the video were made, created, or captured by all group members with the purpose of representing our daily normal life. As the world faces the pandemic, new changes have to be done in order to adapt and remain safe for the protection of ourselves and the ones close to us.
>
> (https://drive.google.com/file/d/
> 1u1GWC3hwo1GusI_eWnsXN_bKjyolRL82/view)

Putting this in terms of the Norwegian concept of democracy beyond country borders and our focus on community engagement, the students took action in their own communities after creating an, albeit temporary, transnational group perspective and then returning with this new perspective to decide on what they would do in their local community.

Finally, students were invited to complete the post-project questionnaire (*reflection stage*). One of the questions was 'Did this intercultural exchange help you to live through the current situation?' Some of their answers were as follows, where it is striking how important the opportunity to talk is for the students:

> Yes, because talking to other people about my feelings helped me get some things off of my chest…

> Yes, talking to people from different places of my country and of the world helped me realize I wasn't alone in this because we were all feeling the same.

The value of also having other modes of expression was also evident in responses:

> Looking at art and trying to find art that helps my emotional well beings a great eye opening that whenever there is bad times there are always ways to help express our feelings.

> The art helped a lot because if there were things I couldn't explain with words; drawing and finding images helped.

The project was clearly demanding in terms of tasks and activities, but it also proved to be motivating enough for students to work with high commitment. The successful accomplishment of all tasks required close teacher supervision and support.

This work is based first on the pedagogy of discomfort, second on arts-based pedagogy and third on the pedagogy of intercultural competence. Pedagogies of discomfort have been used in history, social studies, and civics/citizenship. They have also been used in language classrooms in higher education (Porto & Yulita, 2019) and, recently, in language education involving the arts (Porto & Zembylas, 2020). Pedagogies of discomfort can channel emotions because initially they confront learners with discomforting feelings, and then ask them to critically analyse their emotions. Learners can build on their critical analyses to transform emotional discomfort and engage in healing dialogues and action. It is this action and engagement that brings this pedagogy into line with the third pedagogy of intercultural service learning and education for intercultural citizenship.

Arts-based pedagogy is discussed by Nussbaum (2006), who argues that a humanistic education is "crucial to the formation of citizenship [and] must be cultivated if democracies are to survive" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 388). Nussbaum also argues that education for democracy can be cultivated through engagement with the arts. The arts help develop democratic competences by enabling learners to see through others' eyes, fostering in their imagination significant encounters with the desires, experiences, and feelings of others. Here, we see much overlap in the theoretical positions, and the notion that education should lead to (democratic) engagement with learners' communities is reminiscent of the policy statement quoted above from Norway.

Education for Intercultural and Democratic Competences and the Significance of Values

The pedagogy of intercultural competence echoes these concerns with engagement and learners taking action in the communities to which they belong, and it is this that I want to develop further here by referring to the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.* This framework is based upon an analysis of many models of intercultural competences and of citizenship competences. To that extent, it is not new. It encapsulates much previous work and offers a synthesis. What is notable, nonetheless, is that the framework includes explicit reference to values competences, which is unusual if not original.

The model (Fig. 1) is referred to as 'the Butterfly'. In three of the wings of the butterfly, we find the same as in many models: skills, attitudes, and knowledge and critical understanding. In the fourth wing, we also find values competences.

Figure 2

Model of intercultural and citizenship competences from the Reference Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture
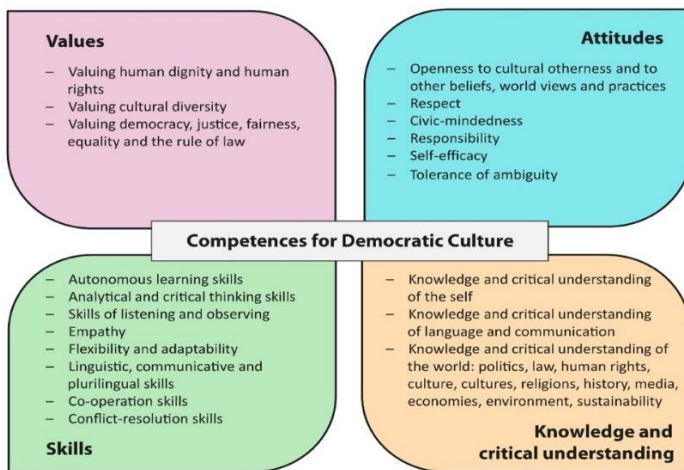
Note. Council of Europe, 2018, p. 38

Some readers may be surprised to see values referred to as competences, but in this model, competences are not simply abilities or skills, as in much everyday usage, and some educational usage. Competences are all the psychological resources - values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding - that a person needs to engage in successful interaction in multicultural and multilingual democracies:

> Competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant *values*, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context. This implies selecting, activating, co-ordinating and organising the relevant set of *values*, [emphasis added] attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills and applying these through behaviour which is appropriate to those situations. (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 70)

The values in question are explicitly stated to be the values of the Council of Europe, an organisation created in 1949, which today embraces 46 states. It is much larger than the European Union with its 26 states. The European Union is focused mainly on economic cooperation. The Council of Europe is based upon valuing human rights, democracy, the rule of law and respect for diversity. The *Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* is therefore explicitly European, but it is not an attempt to impose European values on states or their education systems. The Council of Europe does not wish to impose it on other continents either, and in fact, nor does it impose it on European countries. It is offered to member states where decisions about if and how to use it are made at ministerial level. There is no such thing as a "European curriculum" or "European education". I introduce it here simply as an example of an educational approach that explicitly refers to values.

Secondly, the values of the Council of Europe do not belong to Europe alone. They are values which are present in many countries and because they are present in many countries language teaching and language teachers have a special role to play.

The Role of Language Teaching

One of the values in the Butterfly, is specifically connected with democratic citizenship:

- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

The other two values are crucial to intercultural competence:

- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity

Language teaching has a special role in teaching intercultural values because language teaching can internationalise and be a counter-balance to the nationalism present in all education systems.

Nationalism in state education systems is inevitable, and it can be both positive and negative. On the one hand it is important that young people identify with and understand the society and country to which they belong (Skey, 2013), and one of the important functions of education systems is the enculturation of young people (Barrett, 2007). On the other hand, education systems can be mis-used to tell a 'national story' which is biased, especially in the teaching of history (e.g., Loewen, 2017), and such bias is constant, as we see from current changes in history teaching in Russia (Guardian, 2023).

Such approaches "nationalise" young people into believing that our values are better than their values. For example, children in English schools, according to policy documents, should be encouraged to acquire "British values":

Schools should promote the *fundamental British values* [emphasis added] of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

(Department for Education, 2014, p. 5)

Furthermore, this means that schools should distinguish between "British values" and others:

Actively promoting the values means *challenging opinions or behaviours* in school that are *contrary to fundamental British values* [emphasis added]. Attempts to promote systems that undermine fundamental British values would be completely at odds with schools' duty.

(Department for Education, 2014, p. 5)

What is important here is that there are clear statements about what should be accepted and what should be rejected, or "challenged". This is a part of what is explicitly referred to as a "national curriculum".

My second example comes again from China. The learning of students in China is also guided by policy documents in which it is stated that education should achieve the following goals:

> promote Xi Jinping *Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* into textbooks, into the classroom and into the mind. Unremittingly use Xi Jinping *Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* to shape and cultivate the mind, to guide students to have knowledge of the state of the world, of the country, the Party and the people.

Moreover, there is an interesting statement about the question of identity: that the purpose of education, inter alia, is as follows:

> to enhance one's identity in politics, ideology and affect, with the Party's innovative theories, and strengthen our confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, in Chinese theory, in Chinese system, and in Chinese culture.

Again, unsurprisingly, we have evidence of a policy that is not 'neutral', but states quite explicitly what shall be "promoted"[3].

In Thailand, the goals of education are stated in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 11). The statement of values is rather general in the first paragraph - with the phrase "desirable values":

1. Morality, ethics, desirable values, self-esteem, self-discipline, observance of Buddhist teachings or those of one's faith, and guiding principles of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy;

The second and third goals are familiar from many education systems:

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[3] http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-06/06/content_5517606.htm. My thanks go to Anwei Feng and Lihong Wang for their help in identifying and translating this document.

2. Knowledge and skills for communication, thinking, problem-solving, technological know-how, and life skills;

3. Good physical and mental health, hygiene, and preference for physical exercise;

The fourth and fifth are very explicit about national identity, more explicit than are found in many education systems, and yet all education systems tend to share this way of thinking:

4. Patriotism, awareness of responsibilities and commitment as Thai citizens and members of the world community, and adherence to a democratic way of life and form of government under constitutional monarchy; and

5. Awareness of the need to preserve all aspects of Thai culture and Thai wisdom, protection and conservation of the environment, and public-mindedness with dedication to public service for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 5)

In short, we see in some countries a tendency to emphasise the role of education in the socialisation of young people into the values of the country, into "national" values, and these are not neutral. Teachers are expected to encourage young people to adopt national values and to reject or challenge values that do not correspond to "our" values. National education systems thus have a strong tendency to be inward looking and ethnocentric, and this is where language teachers have a particular role.

Foreign language teaching is by definition international in outlook and encourages learners to suspend their belief that "our values" and way of life are "natural" and inevitable, since they are all that learners know. They should similarly suspend their belief that what others value and how others live their lives are "unnatural". They should learn to use another perspective to see themselves as others see them. This gives language teaching the potential to relativise the national and emphasise the international perspective, to re-consider "our values" by juxtaposing them with others' (Byram, 2018).

In the case of Thailand, it is notable for language teachers that young people should become not only Thai citizens but also "members of the world community", and this opens the way for language

teachers in Thailand to complement a nationalist way of thinking with internationalism. Furthermore, the reference to "public service" opens the opportunity for the kind of engagement with and action in the community that I have described in the example above.

Teachers' Choices

There are certain consequences that follow from adopting this perspective of developing appropriate pedagogies and methods, such as those illustrated in the project described above. It raises questions about the nature of teachers' professional identities. Teachers may question whether it is an aspect of the profession to encourage the kind of democratic criticism and engagement suggested in the argument and in the illustrative example. If they decide that they do wish to embrace this identity, they will also need to consider their position vis-à-vis the expectations of their learners - and in the case of young learners, of their parents - who may be surprised by the methods and purposes to which they are exposed.

Teachers may also have to consider their position regarding the purposes and character of the education system and the society it represents, particularly when reflecting on the values they want their learners to challenge. For example, in the illustrative example above, the teachers might have encouraged their students to analyse critically the policies and actions of the local and national governments. They did not go in this direction, because, as we have seen, their focus was on a pedagogy that would help students deal with their own emotional responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In other work, however, some teachers - including one of the authors of the COVID-19 project, Melina Porto - have shown that they are willing to encourage students to critique, and take action which will make their critique public (Porto & Byram, 2015; Yulita, 2018).

There seem to be three options for the foreign language teacher with respect to promoting and critiquing values, or rather four. The fourth is to reject any responsibility for values education and to emphasise that language teaching is in some sense "neutral", focusing on knowledge about language and on communication skills. This

might be the preferred position of teachers who have some doubts about how the students and the education system may react. They may wish to say, "I am a language teacher and nothing else". However, this position is problematic since it reduces and simplifies the notion of communication to a matter of exchanging information, as I pointed out earlier. Communication is much more than this. It inevitably engages learners in interpersonal interactions when communication goes beyond the superficial tourist-like questions and answers about services in restaurants and so on.

Of the other three other options, the first is for the language teacher to see themselves as similar to other teachers, having a responsibility to teach national values, and - with their outward-looking perspective - to emphasise that we have *our* national values and others have *their* values which are equally valid for them. In the case where language teachers are civil servants, this may be a position consonant with their loyalty to the state.

The second option is to seek the promotion of universal values. This is a complex issue and the debate about the existence of universal values is ongoing[4], but a comparison of the documents from England, China, and Thailand suggests that there is overlap that may indicate some kind of universalism in values. Keywords from those documents include the following:

- England: democracy; rule of law; individual liberty; respect/ tolerance (especially religious)

- China: prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendliness

- Thailand: patriotism; democracy; responsibilities and commitment; public service; peaceful coexistence; harmony

The role of the language teacher would be to emphasise that "our" values are not only ours but shared by others.

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[4] This is not the place to attempt to deal with this debate and I here suggest a pragmatic approach. It is clearly an issue for teachers involved in intercultural language teaching. A useful staring point is Feinberg (1989)

The third option is not to focus upon values as such, whether national or international, local or universal, but rather to emphasise the responsibility of language teachers to promote an open-minded attitude to the values of others, and a critical capacity to evaluate values, both those of others and our own.

An open-minded attitude is one of the competences in the Butterfly framework and is found in many models and analyses, including my own "willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment." (Byram, 2021, p. 63) This means that learners should question what is considered normal by other people and by themselves, and this leads to the notion of critical cultural awareness, which is "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of an explicit, systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries." (Byram, 2021, p. 66) This definition clearly states the significance of evaluating values. Namely, making judgments about values, judgments that are based upon systematic reasoning, judgments that are coherent and logical. To unpack the implications, consider the Oxford English Dictionary definition of "to judge": to form an opinion or conclusion about (a person or thing), especially following careful consideration or deliberation; to assess, evaluate, or appraise" (Judge section).

Judgement therefore includes "evaluation" which is "to express in terms of something already known", which suggests that evaluation is a matter of juxtaposing new experience and values with the familiar, to better understand what is new and, simultaneously, to gain new perspectives on what is familiar. In short. Critical Cultural Awareness leads learners to juxtapose the new and the familiar and to draw conclusions about both.

As a consequence, I argued in the model, learners should be able to "interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges on the basis of a reasoned analysis, *negotiating* [emphasis added] where necessary a degree of acceptance of them by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes." (Byram, 2021, p. 66)

There is however a problem here. There is an implicit assumption that negotiation and acceptance are always possible. This contrasts

with policy statements about values, which, as we have seen above, are not neutral. They imply, and in some cases state explicitly, that values with which we do not agree should be challenged or rejected. In this context, is negotiation an appropriate way of thinking, when other people's values and priorities are different and perhaps opposed to our own?

Other approaches need to be considered, as negotiation may not be possible but "challenge" and "rejection" can lead to xenophobia. In an article written during the COVID-19 crisis, Wagner and Álvarez Valencia (2022, p. 276) note, "concerns are accumulating about an increase in xenophobic rhetoric (….), a resistance to facts and a tendency towards arrogance, and people on social media spending time in echo chambers rather than engaging with each other." They suggest that language (and other) teachers can draw on the theory and practice of *intellectual humility*, defined by Whitcomb et al. (2017, p. 520) as "proper attentiveness to, and owning of, one's intellectual limitations", which is an intellectual virtue when "one is appropriately motivated to pursue epistemic goods, e.g., truth, knowledge, and understanding".

Wagner and Álvarez Valencia describe a teaching project in which US American students of German worked together with their student visitors from Germany on sport and leisure activities. The first part of the project followed previous work on intercultural competence where students interviewed each other and analysed differing perspectives on what constitutes sport and leisure in their countries. The teacher then selected some elements of intellectual humility (IH) and developed activities that derived from the definition these elements. She selected the following elements:

> IH increases a person's propensity
>
> to revise a cherished belief or reduce confidence in it, when she learns of defeaters (i.e. reasons to think her belief is false or reasons to be suspicious of her grounds for it).
>
> to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees.

to have a clearer picture of what he knows and justifiedly believes and what he neither knows nor justifiedly believes.

to hold a belief with the confidence that her evidence merits.
(Whitcomb et al., 2017, pp. 524-525)

In her reflections on the project, the teacher said that her students had gone "more deeply" (Wagner & Álvarez Valencia, 2022, p. 284) into the topic than other groups in previous years who had simply discussed differences and said that what others do is "weird". She was surprised, for example, that the American students questioned and criticised the sports scholarship system in American universities. The authors conclude that adding this extra dimension of intellectual humility to the project enriched students' growing intercultural competence and that "one central achievement for students was to be aware of the limitations of their knowledge." (p. 284) The teacher thought that it was wonderful that students were able to admit ignorance about certain issues. She also saw a link to the political climate in the USA, which was characterised by a lack of dialogue. The broader political significance of this kind of work this becomes evident (Finger & Wagner, 2023).

Conclusion

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education were devastating, and yet led to some innovative teaching and learning approaches. On the basis of analysis and description of a project in remote teaching which brought together university students in the USA and in Argentina to reflect upon their experiences of COVID-19, and then to take action in their respective communities, I have attempted in this article to argue that foreign language teachers in schools and universities have the potential to contribute substantially to the humanistic education of their students and pupils.

There are important consequences not only in matters of teaching methods, but also with respect to the purposes of language education. The emphasis on communication skills needs to be enriched with insights from other pedagogies, including citizenship education and intercultural education. Experiments are being carried out and reported, such as the

one described here. Further experiments need to be done with younger students and those with lower levels of language competence.

We also need to consider that there are extra demands on teachers, demands they may not have been prepared for in their teacher education. Ultimately, this is also a question of teachers' professional identity and their willingness to engage in ethical reflections on their position vis-à-vis the students whom they encourage to critique their own and other people's values, and to become engaged in social action in their communities.

The issues are complex, and this is only a small contribution to the professional debate that language teachers need to have.

Biodata

Michael Byram is Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Durham (UK), Guest Research Professor, Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria and Bualuang ASEAN Chair Professor in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University (Bangkok, Thailand). His work on the intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship dimensions of language teaching has been published in numerous books and articles.

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