Realising the Educational Purposes of Foreign Language Teaching

"Broadening pupils' horizons"[1]

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Abstract

The tension between the instrumental and the educational purposes and aims of language teaching and learning can be traced in the modern era to the late 19th century and Viëtor's famous call for language teaching to take another direction – indeed to turn around. I do not try to trace the historical developments but begin with contemporary history suggesting that language teachers have a more complex social responsibility than simply preparing learners for the world of work. I analyse if the tension between the instrumental and the educational is necessary one or, in fact, false.

The first step is to clarify what is meant by educational aims and what evidence there is that they can be attained. The second is to suggest that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which has been seen as a success in developing instrumental aims, can be introduced into the foreign language classroom and combine educational and instrumental value.

I present some examples, from recent curriculum development work and publications, of what this looks like in practice when developed in the form of project work, and then speculate a little on what more ambitious applications could be.

Introduction

Let me begin with a commentary on my title in which the focus is on 'education' and on 'teaching'. People can learn languages in many ways, not only in schools and not only by being taught. Learning does not always depend on teaching, but in this case I want to focus on the teaching and learning interface.

When people learn languages in schools, they are taught by teachers, and teachers have their personal reasons for teaching. But teachers are part of an education system and a society, and societies have their reasons for keeping young people in educational institutions for many years. So the two words 'education' and 'teaching' in my title are important.

The first word in my title is also important. By 'realising', I mean making something real, making an idea a reality, making theory practice, and later I shall give examples of theory and

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[1] This text is based on a lecture at the conference of LEND in Milan in 2017, and still bears some of the characteristics of a lecture. For a full account of the theory and practice it introduces, see:
Byram, M., Golubeva, I., Han, H., and Wagner, M. (eds) (2017) *From Principles to Practice in Education for Intercultural Citizenship.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters
Wagner, M., Conlon Perugini, D. & Byram, M. (eds) (2018) *Teaching Intercultural Competence across the Age Range: from Theory to Practice*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.)

how it is realised, i.e. the educational ideas which support our work as language teachers. As for my sub-title "Broadening pupils' horizons", that will become evident in due course.

Teachers and Teaching for Practical Purposes

Let me begin then with ideas about teachers, including myself. I began as a secondary school teacher and then for many years I trained teachers of foreign languages. When selecting students for the teacher training course, I would ask why they wanted to teach languages and the answer would almost always include the phrase 'to broaden children's horizons'. I approved of this motivation because I had had the same motivation as a language teacher myself.

The same sentiments are also present in the Italian national curriculum, although in a more general statement:

> Il compito specifico del primo ciclo è quello di promuovere l'alfabetizzazione di base attraverso l'acquisizione dei linguaggi e dei codici che costituiscono la struttura della nostra cultura, *in un orizzonte allargato alle altre culture* con cui conviviamo e all'uso consapevole dei nuovi media.
> *Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* p.32 (emphasis added)

In my professional life I began teaching French and German in a secondary comprehensive school in the south of England in the 1970s. 'Comprehensive' means that everyone had the same curriculum. There was no selection or placing learners in different streams or different types of school. This was still a new idea and was both an educational and a political decision made in the 1960s, and the relationship between education and politics is the main theme of my text.

In the 1970s, Britain had just joined what was to become the EU. I was teaching in a school on an island in the estuary of the River Thames, not far from London geographically but a long way mentally. Not far from France geographically either, but further still mentally.

We were only a short drive and a short ferry ride from France but few children had been more than a few miles 'off the island' and certainly not to a foreign country. Today, their children and grandchildren will have been on a cheap flight to Spain, but I have my doubts about whether this is an experience of a foreign country.

So my colleagues and I spent a lot of time and energy taking our pupils to France and giving them an experience of a foreign country. But we did this *outside* the curriculum. It was not part of what we were expected to do in preparing our learners for examinations.

In the classroom we taught language, and tried to teach learners to use the language for communication; we taught skills. However, despite this practical approach, this communicative approach, my pupils often asked me why they had to learn French. The answer I gave was : to help them communicate, to help them get a job because we were teaching language as if it were for communication. But they did not believe me and they were

right not to believe me. One of my pupils told me his father thought it was better to learn metalwork and woodwork and to get an apprenticeship in a local company.

In short, despite joining the EU there was a lot of isolationism on our little island in the Thames and on the bigger island of Britain, and teaching languages for practical or instrumental reasons was not changing anything. What we were doing outside the classroom, giving our pupils an experience of another culture, was outside the classroom - and had little impact.

The tension between teaching languages for communication in the classroom and providing an horizon-broadening experience outside the classroom was significant and problematic and a problem I have been struggling with ever since.

I don't need to draw the comparisons with BREXIT but I can tell you that BREXIT is not just a question of economics, of being inside or outside a single market. It is also a question of xenophobia, a damaging influence on our society. Xenophobia often hides behind patriotism but as Samuel Johnson said, patriotism is "the last refuge of a scoundrel".

"Broadening horizons" and the politics of language teaching

What has this got to do with language teaching in Italy, you might be asking? Maybe nothing at all. Maybe there is no isolationism and chauvinism; maybe there are no scoundrels. Perhaps teaching English is a different matter from teaching other languages because, as the Italian national curriculum says, (p. 11), it is a lingua franca and more useful. However, there are teachers of other languages in LEND, not just English, and the Italian curriculum talks about broadening learners' horizons, even for English. If we only teach language as an instrument, we lose the value of 'broadening children's horizons'. The tension between teaching for communication and educating for broader horizons is still problematic and perhaps made more so by treating English as a lingua franca. One of the examples below shows how this tension can be overcome using lingua franca English for educational purposes.

Language teaching always takes place in a social and political context and has social and political significance which we cannot ignore. And wherever chauvinism and isolationism is becoming stronger, the potential of language teaching to 'broaden children's horizons' is all the more important.

Chauvinism is a national phenomenon, but the national context is not the only political and social context in which we teach languages. We need to look at the European context and the *Common European Framework for Languages* (CEFR), and perhaps the chauvinism of Europe, of 'fortress Europe'.

The CEFR provides a means of setting instrumental goals for language teaching which are practical and useful for three domains:

- The public domain – meaning social interactions of all kinds
- The occupational domain – meaning activities and relations in the world of work
- The educational domain – referring to the learning and training context.

Behind the CEFR stands an educational philosophy which was not explained in any detail in the CEFR itself. It is important and worth further reflection, because the CEFR is often seen as only a technical document with an instrumental philosophy concerned with mobility and practical language teaching.

In fact, there were quite strong political and educational motives behind the CEFR and all the activities which accompanied it. John Trim talks about the group of people he led from the 1970s and who guided the emergence of the CEFR and all the activities connected with it:

> as a Council of Europe project, [the group's] aim was to promote language learning not as an end in itself (…) but rather as a contribution to the over-arching political aims of the Council. It should serve to improve international understanding and cooperation, promote methods that strengthen democratic practices and develop the learner's independence of thought and action combined with social responsibility. (Trim 2012: 23)

The reference to democratic practices and social responsibility is important and the spirit of what he says is also reflected in another important source for understanding the philosophy, i.e. the writing of Jan van Ek and in particular his 'Objectives for foreign language learning. Volume 1 Scope'. van Ek locates the work on Aims and Objectives for language teaching in wider educational aims. He anticipates Trim's words as follows:

> Our educational aim is to give our pupils the fullest possible scope for fulfilling their potential as unique individuals in a society which is, ultimately, of their own making. (p 12)

He argues that today the presence of language teaching in a curriculum can only be justified by its contribution to general educational aims. He does not focus on the usefulness of language learning. Instead, in 1986 already, he says that there is increasing internationalisation and that this means a sense of belonging to larger communities:

> Next to the community of those we regularly associate with in our daily lives, and next to the recognition of our 'national' community, we are developing a sense of belonging to, and functioning in, even larger communities.

That reference to internationalisation is all the more important today of course and I will refer to internationalisation later with the examples I give.

van Ek (1986) sums up the educational and political aims of the modern languages at the Council of Europe work in three components:
- the promotion of autonomy
- the development of critical powers
- the development of communication ability (p. 24)
As he rightly points out the first two are political concepts or, perhaps better, they can be the basis for political acts.

At this point I want to be clear about what I mean by 'political'. The Oxford English Dictionary has several meanings for both politics and political. I take the 5th meaning for political:

Relating to or concerned with public life and affairs as involving questions of authority and government; relating to or concerned with the theory or practice of politics.

And the 4th meaning of 'politics':

The political ideas, beliefs, or commitments of a particular individual, organization, etc.

This means that when I talk about learners being or becoming political, I mean that they develop their own ideas, beliefs and commitments and on that basis they become involved in public life and 'practice politics' and challenge authority. This can be at any level from the family to the school to the sports club to national and international government.

Van Ek's concepts of autonomy and critical powers are a part of this, but the CEFR does not embody these. The CEFR addresses the 'development of communication ability' but what it says about autonomy and critical powers is very limited. Autonomy is referred to in a few places in the CEFR but only with reference to 'autonomous learning' and 'learning to learn' in language learning. Yet van Ek says that 'autonomy' – a translation of 'Selbstständigkeit' – 'may, rightly or wrongly, be construed as proclaiming political bias' (p 25), as is also the case for 'critical powers'. There are a few uses of the term 'critical' in the CEFR but only with reference to 'critical appreciation of proposals or literary works' (Council of Europe, 2001: 62).

In short the CEFR has become a technical document and lost its potential to give language teaching a richer, political and educational purpose. There is a tension between this technical use and focus on levels and the underlying educational and political purposes which van Ek and Trim – and others – wanted language teaching to pursue. It is a parallel with the tension between teaching languages in the classroom for examinations and seeking the ways and means to broaden learners' horizons, often only possible outside the curriculum.

New Policy Directions and Aspirations

There are however signs of change. A recent statement in the Norwegian curriculum has an enriched view of language teaching:

Foreign languages are both an *educational subject and a humanistic subject.* (…) 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*, and contribute to a joy in reading, creativity, experience and personal development.

(My (literal) translation .)

https://www.udir.no/kl06/PSP1-01/Hele/Formaal - accessed March 2017

In the Italian national curriculum, we find a reference to a 'new humanism' in the general discussion of the aims of schooling:

> – promuovere i saperi propri di *un nuovo umanesimo*: la capacità di cogliere gli aspetti essenziali dei problemi; la capacità di comprendere le implicazioni, per la condizione umana, degli inediti sviluppi delle scienze e delle tecnologie; la capacità di valutare i limiti e le possibilità delle conoscenze; la capacità di vivere e di agire in un mondo in continuo cambiamento.
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> *Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* p.11 (emphasis added)

On the other hand as van Ek said in 1986, many curriculum documents 'consist of a few pages proclaiming lofty educational ideals followed by long and detailed lists of words, structures and facts that the learners are required to "master"' (p.27) We may have moved away from lists of structures etc. but I suspect that his statement that 'the relation between the first few pages and all the rest is, in most cases, far from transparent' (p.27) is still true. Maybe I am wrong and things have improved. It is an empirical question which would necessitate research in classrooms in many European countries.

Experimenting to Realise Aspirations

In the meantime, let me give some examples which are from experiments attempting to bridge the gap between ideas and realities. This is where I come to the first of the key words in my title namely 'realising'.

Let me say immediately that these are experiments not fully developed curricula but that they are experiments which show how ideas can be realised. They are described in more detail in the books mentioned at the beginning of this text.

The first was part of a series of experiments carried out by a network of teachers and researchers. These were projects introduced independently of the existing curriculum. One of the projects described in the book included teachers and learners in Italy.

Green Kidz: Young learners engage in intercultural environmental citizenship in English language classroom in Argentina and Denmark.
Melina Porto, Petra Daryai-Hansen, María Emilia Arcuri and Kira Schifler
In: Byram, Golubeva, Han and Wagner (eds.) (2017) *Education for Intercultural Citizenship – Principles in Practice.* Multilingual Matters.

Participants and aims
The learners were 10-12 year olds in Argentina and in Denmark who were learning English as a foreign language (and in this experiment used English as a lingua franca). During the experiment they met through the internet and worked together as we shall see blow.

The teachers formulated two kinds of aims as follows:

THINKING
• that learners should explore and reflect on environmental issues - globally and locally

• that learners should understand environmental issues and how to recognize them in their own surroundings,

• that learners should challenge taken-for-granted representations of the environment, for example in the media

ACTING
• that learners should engage in activities trash sorting and recycling practices,

• that learners should contribute to improving the environment in their local communities
This was the element influenced particularly by citizenship education and was labelled as
ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

Activities
STAGE 1 –DISCOVER ABOUT 'US' AND PREPARE FOR 'THEM'
•Learners identified what they called 'green crimes' in their schools and in their communities and drew or video-taped these crimes (for example computers left running without being used)

• Learners analysed the trash thrown away in their school and local community; this involves analysis listing, classifying and sorting trash in waste bins

The purpose here is that each group in each country should prepare a presentation for the other and be careful to think of what they needed to tell the other group about their school and environment, taking nothing for granted.

STAGE 2 –PRESENT 'US' TO 'THEM' AND COMPARE
• Each group (or in fact smaller sub-groups) used a wiki to present what they had found out about their own environment to the other (sub)groups and compared what they found (using a wiki)

• Groups carried out further investigations such as a survey among family members, friends, etc. about their environmental habits, and again compared on the wiki

• Some groups analyzed critically (audio) visual media images and texts, produced in Argentina and in Denmark,

The purpose here is to present 'us' to 'them' i.e. still thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them' but learners need to be aware of not taking for granted that 'they' have the same experience as 'us'.

STAGE 3 –WORK TOGETHER –IN 'US AND THEM' GROUP
• In mixed Argentinean and Danish sub-groups the learners collaborated online, using skype and wiki to design leaflets etc. to raise awareness of environmental issues among people in their environment - the school and their ;local community.

Using the internet to share understanding
•http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uysvpqx2vN0

•https://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-the-Planet-Argentina/603179783054514

•http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uysvpqx2vN0

•http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zTlOCskmo8

•http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjgTR6QeetQ

•http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGE9oq3hTdo

The Purpose here is to create international groups which begin to see that environmental issues are global as well as local and are interrelated, with the intention that the learners acquire a new international identification as well as their local and national identity.

ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

STAGE 4 –FOCUS AGAIN ON 'US' AND ACTING …

At this point groups 'returned' to the issues in their own environment - with a new international perspective - and carried out actions of different kinds with the intention of taking their classroom learning activities into their communities - with a different perspective than if they had remained only within their local/national perspectives - and of making some change of benefit to the community.

For example the Argentinean pupils:
•created videos and songs and shared in Facebook page

•were interviewed by a local journalist and got the collaborative posters published in local newspaper,

•designed a "pasacalles" (banner) and hung it in the school street.

The second example shows how a teacher can take the existing curriculum and change it to meet the aims she has for developing intercultural competence and political engagement:

Discovering Modes of Transportation - Dorie Conlon Perugini
From: TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE ACROSS THE AGE RANGE: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE
Edited by Manuela Wagner, Dorie Conlon Perugini, Michael Byram
Multilingual Matters [October 2017]

Context: the students are in 4th grade, 9 and 10 years old, and have been having Spanish lessons of a total of 75 minutes a week since the age of 6. Their proficiency is 'ACTFL Novice Mid to Novice High' = A1.1 CEFR.

There is a designated curriculum in 4th grade centered on the 'Essential Question' '*How are we connected to the Caribbean?'* and this example shows how the teacher took the designated Unit 'Modes of Transportation' as a basis for her experiment.

Lesson 1
• Using 'Total Physical Response' methods, the teacher introduced vocabulary to describe transportation in their home town of Glastonbury (Connecticut, USA). She used pictures of familiar modes of transportation: car, truck, airplane, boat, motorcycle, bike, etc. The learners invented gestures to designate the vocabulary (e.g. pretending to hold a steering wheel to represent a car).

• The lesson continued in traditional way: use knowledge of already-mastered vocabulary and sentence structures to describe and state opinions about the different modes of transportation in their familiar environment e.g.
•*El carro es azul. (The car is blue.)*
•*El avión es muy grande. (The airplane is very big.)*
•*La motocicleta tiene dos ruedas. (The motorcycle has two wheels.)*
•*Me gusta el tren. No me gusta el barco. (I like the train. I don't like the boat.)*

Lesson 2
•The learners watched a short video of a typical ride in a *carro público (*a shared taxi) in Puerto Rico; the students see the experience from the point of view of passengers entering and exiting. They also see other transportation viewed through the eyes of a *carro público* passenger: cars, trucks, *gua guas* (local taxi buses), motorcycle taxis, people walking, etc.

• In a pre-unit journal the teacher had asked learners to write what they expected to see in transportation in the Caribbean different, and now wrote about the differences they actually saw.

Lesson 3 – critical thinking skills
Students were already familiar with the geography of Puerto Rico and how to use the Google Earth iPad app and so they were asked to plan virtual trips to Puerto Rico, from Naubuc School in Glastonbury, to San Juan, Puerto Rico. They were given a list of places to visit (the beach, el Moro, Viejo San Juan, etc.).

For example, one group decided they would use a car to get from Glastonbury to the airport in Connecticut's capital city, Hartford. They would then use an airplane to get from Hartford to San Juan. Once in San Juan, they chose to use several different types of local transportation to get from one location to the next, all dependent on how long the trip would take and what they may be carrying with them at the time.

In this lesson the teacher's aim was to encourage autonomy and criticality. They had to make choices about transportation and give their reasons.

Lesson 4 – with language arts teacher
At this point the aim was for learners to take their learning into the community - their 'action in the community - but their language proficiency was too low to continue in the target language, and the Spanish teacher cooperated with the language arts teacher.

The classroom teacher, also the language arts teacher, was about to focus on 'persuasive writing'. To develop this together with critical thinking, the learners were asked to choose atopic related to transportation (in the US or the Caribbean) and create a persuasive argument via e.g. commercials, billboards, songs/jingles, poetry, posters, radio broadcasts, podcasts, etc..
The topics they chose included creating documents about:
- increasing public transportation in Glastonbury,
- asking motorcyclists in the Caribbean to wear helmets,

> - the number of passengers in a *carro público* to the number of seatbelts available.
>
> In this way they took [POLITICAL] ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

I must make clear that these are experimental projects. The teachers do not do this kind of work all the time. In fact just one project a year is enough as a beginning, Let me also say that during these projects the focus was on content not on language and accurate language use. The projects brought some of the elements of Content and Language Integrated Learning into the foreign language classroom.

Theoretical Foundations

Behind these two examples lies a theory of intercultural citizenship. Essentially this consists of combining the internationalism of foreign language teaching with the action orientation of citizenship education.

Citizenship education encourages the teaching of knowledge about the country and state within which pupils live and the teaching of how to become engaged and active in one's communities. But citizenship education usually focuses on the local and the national, not the international.

Foreign language education focuses on the international, on 'broadening horizons', but it does not usually include the idea of teaching pupils to become actively engaged in an international community.

In the work of these teachers and the researchers supporting them, the two approaches or theories as complementary and we have been developing the theory with the practice in such experiments in recent years. In other words we have been trying to make foreign language teaching 'political' in the sense described above and repeated here for convenience:

When I talk about people, learners, being or becoming political /taking action in the community, I mean that they develop their own ideas, beliefs and commitments and on that basis they become involved in public life and 'practice politics' and challenge authority.

In the Italian national curriculum, I find ample justification for this approach when it says – again under the notion of a new humanism:

> - diffondere la consapevolezza che i grandi problemi dell'attuale condizione umana (il degrado ambientale, il caos climatico, le crisi energetiche, la distribuzione ineguale delle risorse, la salute e la malattia, l'incontro e il confronto di culture e di religioni, i dilemmi bioetici, la ricerca di una nuova qualità della vita) possono essere affrontati e risolti attraverso *una stretta collaborazione non solo fra le nazioni, ma anche fra le discipline e fra le culture*.
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> *Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* p.7

The children in the Green Kidz project were concerned with several of the concepts listed here.

Conclusion

In short, I have tried to argue for a politically oriented language teaching and I have also tried to show how this can be realised.

To end, I will change my subtitle: from 'broadening pupils' horizons' to 'helping people to become political' and say that my purpose has been:

"Realising the Educational Purposes of Foreign Language Teaching

Helping pupils to become political"

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