

Intercultural Citizenship as the Ultimate Goal of Foreign Language Education: The Role of Critical Cultural Awareness

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In this paper I propose an expansion of the goals of foreign language education to encompass intercultural citizenship. I also suggest that to reach that goal, the fostering of critical cultural awareness (CCA) is a crucial step. I explain the concept of CCA, drawing mainly on the work of Byram (1997) and Guilherme (2002). I relate CCA to national curriculum documents of Portugal, Vietnam, and Japan. Finally, I introduce related research that has been published recently, and suggest directions for additional research. Although CCA was conceptualized specifically for foreign language education, it can and I believe should be applied to the teaching of a wide range of disciplines, certainly all those within the domain of policy studies.

Key Words : intercultural communication competence, intercultural citizenship, critical cultural awareness, foreign language education

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In this paper, my intention is to introduce a new audience to some important ideas and research concerning the most appropriate goals for foreign language education. I will first present some logical arguments for a dramatic expansion of the goals of foreign language education. The preliminary conclusion will be that the highest ultimate goal for foreign language teaching should be the nurturing of intercultural citizens. I define intercultural citizens as people who are willing and able to exercise their rights and fulfill their duties as citizens of multiple, diverse and ever-changing communities, up to and including the community of the global village. From

that conclusion, I will proceed to define and elaborate the sub-goal that bears most directly on fostering intercultural citizenship: critical cultural awareness (hereafter CCA). Finally, I will suggest some directions for further reading and research for readers who see some value in this approach. Although education for CCA and intercultural citizenship are by no means the exclusive domains of foreign language educators, I believe that foreign language education has a special opportunity and special responsibility to take a leading role. I believe, however, that CCA and intercultural citizenship merit the careful attention of educators in other disciplines as well. Since my purview is quite broad, with different unfamiliar elements to different readers, I hope that Figure 1 will provide some useful orientation.

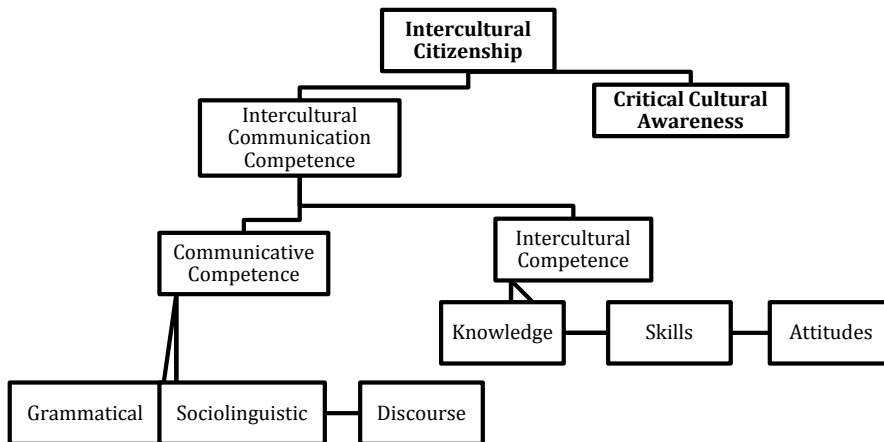


Figure 1: A proposed hierarchy of worthwhile goals for foreign language education

From Grammatical Competence to Intercultural Communicative Competence

Figure 1 represents a hierarchy of appropriate goals for language educators as I perceive them. At the bottom left of the figure is grammatical competence, involving the learning of vocabulary and rules for how to combine vocabulary items into sentences. Disappointingly, foreign language education that still limits itself to the goal of grammatical competence is not uncommon, even though more 30 years of research on second acquisition has demonstrated that this goal is not adequate. In the 1960s, the linguistic scholar Dell Hymes (e.g. 1967) argued convincingly that with only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, people of a speech community would not be able to communicate effectively with each other. In addition to grammatical competence, Hymes pointed out, successful communication also requires competence in producing language that is not just grammatically accurate but also situationally appropriate. Hymes' idea gradually came to be accepted by scholars of foreign language learning,

and in 1980, Canadian scholars Michael Canale and Merrill Swain proposed a model of communicative competence for foreign languages. Their model included sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence in addition to grammatical competence. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to adjust speech according to the social characteristics of your conversation partner(s), the topic, and the setting. Discourse competence is the ability to put whole conversations and texts together above the sentence level, including how to begin and end, and how to take turns smoothly. Canale and Swain's model attracted much attention and acceptance, and it is safe to say that today, communicative competence has finally become an important goal of the majority of modern foreign language programs in the world, though far from all as mentioned above. Moreover, the practices of individual teachers are not always consistent with program goals.

Even if implemented properly, communicative competence as the overarching goal of foreign language teaching has an important shortcoming.

Hymes' original conception of communicative competence was intended to explain how members of the same speech community can communicate effectively with each other, whereas foreign language learning is intended to enable learners to communicate with people from different speech communities, who, in addition to speaking different languages, are likely to have many different cultural habits, expectations, and values. The competence needed to be able to manage or overcome these various cultural differences is usually referred to as intercultural competence. Like communicative competence, intercultural competence is often divided into three parts: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowledge is clearly important because there are many valuable things that can be learned about the culture or cultures associated with the particular foreign language, yet those pieces of knowledge are of limited utility without skills for how to use them quickly and appropriately while communicating. Moreover, members of different cultures communicating with each other are not likely to be successful unless they can display positive attitudes toward each other, and be flexible when they do not get the response that they expect. Thus, attitudes are a third essential component of intercultural competence.

Combining communicative competence with intercultural competence yields a powerful overarching competence that is often called intercultural communicative competence. Although to many language educators, intercultural communicative competence already appears an over-ambitious goal for foreign language teaching, an increasing number of scholars argue that even this challenging goal is not adequate as an ultimate

goal for foreign language teaching in the 21st century. One major reason is that many foreign language students, equipped with good training in intercultural communicative competence, are still unable or unwilling to communicate deeply with members of different cultures. In other words, they can effectively manage their touristic or exchange student communicative needs when they travel to foreign countries, and can likely have a good time doing so, but they are not able or willing to work closely together with their host culture counterparts, for example in negotiating decisions and coordinating complex tasks. Nor are they necessarily more open to welcoming and developing relationships with cultural Others once they return home. Since the need for culturally different people to work and live together harmoniously is already a critical worldwide need, and will continue to increase in importance in the foreseeable future, foreign language education can be most effective if it expands its goals even further, most crucially to encompassing the development of CCA.

Beyond Intercultural Communicative Competence to CCA

CCA is a concept first introduced by Michael Byram (1997), which he defined as "an ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products of one's own and other cultures and countries"(p. 53). CCA is related to but transcends intercultural communicative competence because, for one thing, it involves re-thinking and re-experiencing the concept of cultural identity itself. When students examine deeply their own multiple cultural identities, as well as the multiple cultural identities of members of other

cultural groups with whom they have an opportunity or need to relate, they are able to understand, and eventually to feel, not only the overlap of identities between themselves and other groups, but also the non-unitary non-fixed nature of identity. The flexibility and openness to additional identities that result make it possible to feel real membership in diverse multicultural working groups, which have been normal in many parts of the world for a long time, but until recently unusual in some other parts. Education for CCA involves helping students reach the point of appreciating deeply that all cultures and people are not separate, but inter-related, and not static, but constantly changing. With such an appreciation, a student is prepared to live and work comfortably with diverse groups of people, and can get things done by working and negotiating skillfully and democratically with diverse others whose ideas, judgments, and values will certainly clash on many occasions.

As I said in the introductory paragraph, intercultural citizens are people who are willing and able to exercise their rights and fulfill their duties as citizens of multiple, diverse and ever-changing communities, including even the community of the global village. Intercultural communicative competence plus CCA represent the tools that can foster good intercultural citizens, and foreign language education is potentially well-suited to developing those tools. The following sections will elaborate various aspects of CCA.

CCA and Criticality

The need to “evaluate critically” in Byram’s (1997, p. 53) definition of CCA often invokes skepticism

among Asian readers. Asian education generally avoids explicit criticality, and Asian communication generally values a very cautious approach to criticism. The emphasis of Byram’s suggestion, however, is not so much to express criticism as it is to bring unconscious assumptions to the level of awareness, i.e. to ask oneself “why?” about things that one has previously taken for granted. At the most basic level, this involves fundamental questions to oneself about how one’s identities, values, and practices have developed (reflection), as well as curiosity, speculation, and inquiry about the same items for cultural Others (exploration). This process not only makes visible areas of commonality with diverse Others, but also allows deeper understanding of the nature of conflicts when they occur. Byram’s specification of “explicit criteria” for evaluation allows the transcendence of a general disapproval of and/or annoyance with cultural Others’ statements, positions, approaches, practices, etc. Equally importantly, it gives multicultural group members the ability to pinpoint and articulate difference, such that conflicts can more likely be resolved with minimum negative emotion. Further discussion of the appropriateness of criticality as an approach and intercultural citizenship as a goal in the Asian, specifically Japanese, context can be found in Sawyer (2014).

CCA and Existing Educational Policy

Another potential source of skepticism could be a perceived gap between my suggestions and the current reality, for example at the level of authorized curricula or actual teacher practices. Starting with the curriculum level, although I cannot present a thorough international analysis of relevant national

education policy, I will present published statements from national educational authorities in Portugal, Vietnam, and Japan, and analyze them briefly for what they imply regarding CCA.

First, in its introduction to the secondary English curriculum, the Portuguese Ministry of Education states that “in the context of a plurilingual and pluricultural Europe, the access to various languages becomes increasingly valuable for European citizens, not only as a requirement to communicate with others, but also as a fundamental base for a civic, democratic, and humanistic education,” and goes on to add “Language learning benefits from the involvement of a questioning, analytical, and critical posture, facing reality, and contributing to the development of active, engaged, and autonomous citizens” [my translation](Portugal Ministério da Educação. (2003, p. 1). Thus, the goals and approach that I have proposed in this paper are highly consonant with what the Portuguese Ministry of Education espouses, and it would not be difficult to find similar views expressed in the curriculum documents of many nations in Europe.

In an Asian context, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2008) has published a goal statement that specifies “... by 2020 most Vietnamese students...will be able to use a foreign language confidently in their daily communication, their study and work in an integrated, multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment, making foreign languages a comparative advantage of development for Vietnamese people in the cause of industrialization and modernization for the country” (p. 1).

Finally, in Japan, the introduction of MEXT’s

(2012) Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication includes “...globalization intensifies the need for coexistence with different cultures and civilizations as well as international cooperation. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan received much support from abroad, and every Japanese felt connected with the world as a member of the global community; at the same time, we rediscovered the need for dissemination of information overseas and the importance of the English language as a tool to achieve this goal. ... In the modern society with deepening international competition and coexistence, it is extremely important to develop human resources for activities on a global scale through acquiring language skills and accumulating cross-cultural experience” (p. 2).

The similarities and differences of the three national statements are instructive. They all recognize the importance of responding to an increasingly inter-connected world by giving young people linguistic skills, and they all at least imply that purely linguistic skills are not enough. Vietnam makes most explicit reference to “daily communication ... in an integrated, multicultural and multi-lingual environment,” but concludes by suggesting that the ultimate goal is Vietnamese development. Japan makes most explicit reference to global cooperation and coexistence, and even goes so far as to say that on one occasion “every Japanese felt connected with the world as a member of the global community.” However, it returns to a shallower quantitative focus of getting more language skills and cross-cultural experience. The Portuguese statement clearly goes furthest with goals to include “civic, democratic and humanistic education,” which will foster “active,

engaged, and autonomous citizens,” and also goes much further with how to reach those goals by endorsing a “questioning, analytical, and critical posture.” On the other hand, its frame of reference is explicitly Europe, whereas Japan’s is the world, and Vietnam’s is left unstated.

While Portugal explicitly included endorsement of a “critical posture,” and Vietnam and Japan may or may not have intentionally avoided such an approach, the actual meaning of “critical” is subject to disagreement and therefore mutual misunderstanding. Though a number of scholars have made important efforts to explicate the concept in general and in relation to education and even foreign language education, Manuela Guilherme (2002) goes the furthest in tracing the sources of critical pedagogy, and proposing a comprehensive definition of CCA that can be used by educators.

Guilherme’s Elaboration of CCA

Guilherme’s (2002) definition of CCA is as follows: “A reflective, exploratory, dialogical, and active stance toward cultural knowledge and life that allows for dissonance, contradiction, and conflict as well as for consensus, concurrence, and transformation. It is a cognitive and emotional endeavor that aims at individual and collective emancipation, social justice, and political commitment” (p. 219). She then adds that its development is cyclical rather than linear, and she goes on to propose operations that drive the cycle forward.

There is nothing in Guilherme’s (2002) definition contradictory to the simpler one of her mentor Byram (1997), and on first glance it may seem unnecessarily

complicated. However, each part implies practices that should be fostered in the classroom to actually achieve CCA. For example, whereas Byram suggests “an ability to evaluate critically,” Guilherme specifies more particular qualities (and implicitly actions) that will lead to that ability, i.e. reflection, exploration, dialogue, and proactiveness. She also warns that the process will necessarily involve some discomfort, in the form of dissonance, contradiction, and conflict, along with the hoped-for consensus, concurrence, and transformation. She then makes explicit that developing CCA is not solely a cognitive endeavor, but also involves emotions, as can easily be inferred from the presence of dissonance, etc. Finally, in articulating the appropriate aims of CCA, she shows clearly its connection with responsible democratic citizenship, whether at local, national, or supra-national levels. Keeping these elements in mind, ways to work toward CCA with only minor adjustments to various of classroom practices become readily apparent. Moreover, though Guilherme’s intended domain is foreign language education, the components can serve as a potential template for all forms of citizenship education.

The CCA formulation developed in Guilherme (2002) is derived from and supported by a variety of sources: she elaborates on how she is most directly influenced by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (e.g. 1970), and one of his successors Henry Giroux (e.g. 1997). In applying critical pedagogy to foreign language education, she is guided by the approaches to intercultural communicative competence of Michael Byram (e.g. 1997) and Claire Kramsch (e.g. 1993), the postcolonial language education suggestions of Alastair Pennycook (e.g. 1994) and Suresh Canagarajah (e.g. 2013), and the progressive

curriculum documents *The Common European Framework* (Council of Europe, 1996) and *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996). The philosophical underpinnings of CCA draw on the Frankfurt School scholars of critical theory (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse), Jurgen Habermas, and the postmodern theorists Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard.

While the ideal of CCA is worth pursuing if practical, it prompts the question of how far it is from the everyday practices of foreign language teachers. To begin to ascertain this, Guilherme (2000) conducted a questionnaire and focus group study of Portuguese high school teachers of English as part of her dissertation, the main results of which are also reported in Guilherme (2002). Guilherme notes that “Portugal is a particularly interesting case since teachers are now required by the national syllabus to carry out a ‘critical interpretation’ of the English speaking cultures they teach” (p. 170). To summarize Guilherme’s results briefly, the participating secondary teachers were on balance open to including cultural content; they put emphasis on a critical approach; they used dialogic and hermeneutic methods; they raised consciousness of cultural paradigms; they tried to promote democratic citizenship; and they viewed themselves as cultural mediators. On the other hand, they fell short of Guilherme’s expectations in their general lack of familiarity with relevant theory and professional training models; appropriation of a non-Eurocentric, post-colonial perspective; scrutiny of power imbalances between different cultural groups; and full application of the idea of FL education as political education.

Future Directions

The most fundamental need to is to expand awareness of critical cultural awareness and intercultural citizenship. This needs to be done in many ways—conceptually, empirically, pedagogically—and in many contexts. One immediate direction for future empirical research is to corroborate Guilherme’s conclusions about the actual practices of foreign language teachers. Sawyer (2013) has begun to dig deeper into teachers beliefs and practices in the Portuguese context, using interview methodology to complement Guilherme’s questionnaire and focus group methodology. To expand the research beyond the Portuguese context, Sawyer and Mai (2014) have begun a comparison of teachers in Portugal and Vietnam, and a further comparison with teachers in Japan is in the planning stages. More analysis of and advocacy for relevant curriculum is the second important need. In this area, Parmenter (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2010) has built a solid foundation for research of intercultural citizenship education in Japan, and Houghton (2008, 2012) has cleared the path for classroom research, by conducting a comparative instructional study of three approaches to fostering the qualities needed for intercultural citizenship. Houghton has also been involved in providing additional rich resources for further work on criticality and interculturality, most notably in the form of two edited collections (Tsai & Houghton, 2010; Houghton & Yamada, 2012).

Besides some of the chapters in the edited books mentioned above, inspiration and ideas for teaching toward CCA and intercultural citizenship can be found in Crookes (2012) and Sung & Peterson (2012). A promising specific approach to developing CCA

using literary texts has been developed Matos (2005, 2011, 2012). For a recent analysis of the environment for CCA-relevant educational policy-making and implementation in Japan, refer to Aspinall (2013). For additional elaboration and clarification of Byram's ideas on CCA and intercultural citizenship, refer to Alred et al. (2006) and Byram (2008). For additional elaboration and clarification of Guilherme's ideas, refer to Guilherme (2006; 2007; Guilherme et al., 2010; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004).

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted raise awareness of critical cultural awareness and intercultural citizenship as worthwhile educational priorities, specifically, but not exclusively, for foreign language educators. I have chosen to use my allotted space to place the concepts in a hierarchy of teaching goals, and then elaborate on the nature of the two concepts, with special reference to the thinking of Michael Byram and Manuela Guilherme, as well as with small excerpts to three national curriculum documents. There could, of course, be much more effective ways to introduce the concepts than I have done here, and I welcome feedback and further discussion so that I can help myself and others to prepare students to thrive in and improve the world that they have inherited.

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