

6 Internationalism, Democracy, Political Education

An Agenda for Foreign Language Education

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Introduction

“So Two Cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that” (Forster, 1939). Forster wrote these words in 1939, under the shadow of war with Nazi Germany which, he feared, would destroy democracy and culture. Democracy, he says, deserves one cheer because it starts from the assumption that the individual is important, and that “all types are needed to make a civilisation”. Today we use words such as “multicultural” and “diversity”; Forster uses admirably simple words. Democracy, he says, deserves a second cheer because it allows criticism and, without public criticism, “there is bound to be hushed-up scandal” (1965, p. 77). Such scandals are part of our contemporary experience and the function of the Press – Forster gives it a capital letter – is as important as ever, if not more so.¹ Criticism is also a crucial element of the agenda for language teaching which is the focus of this chapter.

Our purpose in this chapter is, then, to propose an agenda – “things to be done” – for foreign language education and to demonstrate that the inevitably political nature of education, with its nationalist perspectives, should be enriched by embracing internationalism, a perspective which language teaching is especially able to embody and realize.

To do so, we shall first present and discuss some key concepts: internationalism in education, criticality and intercultural citizenship, and competences for intercultural and democratic culture. We shall then present an illustration of these concepts and purposes in a project devised to help learners to respond to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Internationalism in Education

An analysis of internationalism in education needs to begin with nationalism. Much has been written about nationalism but here it is the

relationship of nationalism to education in schools which is of particular interest, for schools are a fundamental factor in the creation of national identity in young people (Barrett, 2007). One element in this process, albeit mentioned only *en passant* in histories of nationalism, is the question of language. It has been shown that a national language – usually linked to a national literature, often a folk literature – is crucial, though not a *sine qua non*, in the evolution of nationalism and nation states (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1987; Hobsbawm, 1992), a process which Risager (2006, p. 26) describes as the “nationalisation of language subjects”, of French in France or Danish in Denmark etc. Schools are the prime location for learning a national language and Gellner describes the process of a “perpetual plebiscite” in which a national language is valued, whereas dialects – and today he would doubtless refer also to languages of migration – are devalued:

There is indeed a perpetual plebiscite, a choice rather than a fatality. But the choice does not ignore the given cultural opportunities and resources. It takes place, not every day perhaps, but at each *rentrée des classes*. And the anonymity, the amnesia, are essential; it is important not merely that each citizen learn the standardised, centralised, and literate idiom in his (sic) primary school, but also that he should forget or at least devalue the dialect (*and language – our addition*) which is not taught in school.

(1987, p. 17)

Hobsbawm added a further element: “social mobility”. He argues that acquisition of the national language facilitates social mobility, and simultaneously reinforces the status of the national language. In this process it is the secondary school which is important:

The crucial moment in the creation of (national) language as a potential asset is not its admission as a medium of primary education (though this automatically creates a large body of primary teachers and language indoctrinators) but its admission as a medium of secondary education, For it is this which Links social mobility to the vernacular, and in turn to linguistic nationalism.

(1992, p. 118)

These are significant insights, but the role of schooling both includes and goes beyond language in the process of creating of nationalism.

For, although not noticed by authors such as Gellner and Hobsbawm,² nationalism is also present across much of the curriculum, and school curricula are often “national” in name and almost always national in character.³ Curricula enjoin teachers to teach “our” language, literature, geography and history – and even science.⁴ Often the expectation remains implicit, but some curricula have a quite explicit reference to the role of

schooling in creating national identity, especially if the state has been founded relatively recently. A striking example is provided by Singapore, a new country with a complex population of different “races” – the term used in Singapore – where schooling is expected to create loyalty and national identity (Martin & Feng, 2006), and Green in a wide-ranging survey also takes Singapore as an example to support his general statement that:

In the developing world, however, there has been an ever more explicit link between education and state formation, which education unequivocally linked with both citizen formation and national economic development.

(1997, p. 143)

Green goes on to argue that, although globalization has made education systems more “porous”, i.e. influenced by ideas – and teachers and students – transferred from other countries through internationalization, nonetheless “there is little evidence that national systems as such are disappearing or the national states have ceased to control them. They may seem less distinctive and their roles are changing but they still undoubtedly attempt to serve national ends” (1997, p. 171).

More than two decades later, there is still no sign of change, and yet where globalization has led to the introduction into curricula of new foci on global issues, there is a new opportunity for Foreign Language Education (FLE). For, in national curricula, the position of foreign languages is an anomaly. A national curriculum creates affective relationships with the learners’ own country whereas FLE directs attention to other countries. Historically, this was a matter of including knowledge about one or more countries where the language is spoken, known as *Landeskunde*, *civilization* and variants on these terms. *Landeskunde* included geography, history and other aspects of “area studies”; literature was usually given a separate status (Kramer, 2012). At first glance, this seems to mirror the treatment of national language, history, geography etc. in school curricula, but there is a significant difference. The teaching of a national language, literature, history etc. supports – and is intended to support – feelings of identification with “the” or “our”⁵ nation, often reinforced by daily routines such as the pledge to the flag in the classroom, singing the national anthem or the presence of a picture of the Head of State on the classroom wall. The difference is, however, important. Attention to other countries is not intended to create an identification with them but to open minds to other ways of thinking and living.

Such “opening” is a counter-balance and even a threat to the many instances where nationalism is used for chauvinistic purposes, especially in times of “crisis”. At the time of writing, it is a matter of closing down rather than opening up, as the pandemic of COVID-19 dominates the world, and old prejudices and new politicizations are appearing. The

fear of “foreigners” – in fact often no more foreign than those who fear them – was reported on opposite sides of the world:

Over the past few weeks, as Chinese health officials reported new “imported” coronavirus cases almost every day, foreigners living in the country have noticed a change. (...) “There is an effect when state media are reporting this as a foreign virus”, said Jeremiah Jenne, an American historian living in Beijing. “It is a new variation of a familiar theme: don’t trust foreigners. If there is another flare-up in China, the blame will fall on people coming from outside.”

(Kuo & Davidson, 2020, para. 1)

The author of the article goes on to suggest that it is “the leadership’s attempt to shore up its image” by directing anger towards foreigners, even though many of those said to be bringing back the virus were Chinese people returning home.

No country has the monopoly of prejudice. A few days earlier the same newspaper reported similar attitudes in the USA where, here too, the leadership was using the opportunity for political advantage:

Across the US, Chinese Americans, and other Asians, are increasingly living in fear as the coronavirus spreads across the country amid racial prejudice that the outbreak is somehow the fault of China. It is a fear grounded in racism, but also promoted from the White House as Donald Trump – and his close advisers – insist on calling it “the Chinese virus”. (...)

“This is becoming more widespread”, said Rosalind Chou, an associate professor of sociology at Georgia State University. “My fear is coughing in public, coughing while Asian, and the reaction other people will have”.

(Aratini, 2020, paras 3–4)

In short, the ideals of harmony and cooperation and pursuit of common goals for humanity – for both “us” and “them” – is challenged by concern only for “us” and the exclusion of “them”, by competition to buy the most face masks using financial super-power, and to have “the best” mortality and vaccination statistics. Any criticism of such positions risks being called “unpatriotic”. Yet criticism is not only a characteristic of journalism, as Forster said, but is also the business of education.

The challenge to chauvinism can come from foreign language education, but the international nature of FLE has never been properly promoted as a means of creating a critical perspective or developing an internationalist identity and loyalty. Even in Europe where the notion of a “European dimension” across the curriculum has been pursued since the 1970s (Savvides, 2008), the potential for language learning as a means of creating a new identity has received little attention.⁶ Theoretical proposals

that language teaching should become “transnational” (Risager, 2006) or “transcultural” (e.g. Biell and Doff, 2014; Reimann, 2018) refer to the lack of research on the impact of language learning on national and other identities, but do not make detailed proposals of what this could or should be. We need an internationalist FLE and for that we need to look more carefully at the notion of internationalism.

Although Holbraad (2003) identifies and analyses “liberal”, “socialist”, “hegemonic” and “conservative” internationalism, the most well-known and influential type is “liberal internationalism”, defined by Halliday as:

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 being peace and prosperity.

(1988, p. 192)

Holbraad too links liberal internationalism with “confidence in the rational and moral qualities of human beings” and “faith in progress towards more orderly social relations” (2003, p. 39).

Although there are different interpretations of internationalism, as said above, Halliday (1988) suggests that all types of internationalism share three characteristics. The first two are descriptive. First there is an acknowledgement that there is a globalization process at work – i.e. a binding together through communications and trade, begun in the nineteenth century with the invention of railways and steamships. The second common characteristic is attention to managing the impact of economic internationalization or globalization on political processes. Whatever the convictions of national groups or entities – governments, trade unions, feminists, opponents of nuclear power or capitalism – all cooperate more closely as a consequence of the phenomenon of globalization.

The third characteristic is of a different nature. It is the normative assertion that the first two are phenomena which should be welcomed, since they promote understanding, peace, prosperity “or whatever the particular advocate holds to be most dear” (Halliday, 1988, p. 188). Internationalism in this view can therefore be interpreted in multiple ways in multiple contexts and groups, but a fourth general feature of internationalism brings a clearer focus. This is the association of internationalism with democracy. Invoking both Immanuel Kant and Woodrow Wilson, Goldmann (1994, p. 54) suggests that internationalist agendas go hand-in-hand with democratic change at the domestic level: “[It is part of] the tradition of internationalist thinking to consider law, organization, exchange, and communication to be more likely to lead to peace and security if states are democratic than if they are authoritarian”. Furthermore, as Thomas Mann – like Forster concerned about the end of democracy – wrote in the depths of the 1930s and the fascism in Europe,

democracy has far more than a political meaning; it is a question of human dignity:

Ich knüpfe [den Namen der Demokratie] an das Menschlichste, an die Idee und das Absolute, ich bringe ihn in Beziehung zu des Menschen unveräußerlicher und durch keine Gewaltniedrigung zerstörbarer Würde.

(1937/2005, p. 320)

I connect [the name of democracy] with that which is most human, to the idea, to the absolute, I relate it to the dignity of mankind, inalienable and indestructible by any violent humiliation.

(our translation)

In education there has been little analysis of internationalism, either conceptual or empirical, particularly in the context of compulsory schooling. This historic lack of interest among educationists was probably due to the dominant unquestioned assumption that schooling is “of course” a matter for nations and their states and, as a consequence, nationalism predominated in the past and extends its influence into the present. One exception is a focus on the intercultural mindset in the International Baccalaureate, where one might indeed expect internationalism to appear. Yet even here there is more focus on skills or competences than on values and identifications (Castro, Lundgren & Woodin, 2015).

There are nonetheless some signs of change in policy making for FLE. Halliday refers to the normative characteristic of internationalism as “aspirational”, and in education, one of the functions of policies is to encourage aspiration. Those who write policies and curricula for FLE are beginning to recognize the need for a richer and more complex educational perspective. There are two elements involved. The first is recognizing the need to address global problems and the role of education in doing so. For example, in the Italian curriculum of 2012 a statement to this effect emphasizes the approach to be taken in the whole curriculum:

– to promote the knowledge proper to a new humanism: the ability to grasp the essential aspects of problems; the ability to understand the implications for the human condition of new developments in science and technology; the ability to assess the limits and possibilities of knowledge; the ability to live and act in a changing world.

(Ministero dell’istruzione, dell’università e della ricerca, 2012, p. 11 – our translation)

The second element is a new focus on how FLE can and should not only pursue instrumental purposes but also humanistic ones. This can be found in Norway for example:

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.

(our (literal) translation)⁷

Here we see that language teaching should lead to respect for other people’s values as a consequence of “living into” other ways of life. Language can and should also lead to a better understanding of self. This is not just a European concern. In China every university student must succeed in “College English” before they can graduate and although one might expect that this is to ensure a workforce with useful English competences, the rationale also refers to the College English course as “part of the humanity (liberal arts) education and it represents both instrumental and humanistic features”.

This *leitmotif* of “humanism” is part of recognizing the need for a richer and more complex educational perspective which might be realized through internationalism. There are two elements involved. The first is the recognition of the need to address global problems and the role of FLE in doing so. One example, from the Bavarian curriculum for languages, makes explicit reference to peace education, with the assertion that language teaching should:

develop the readiness to accept and respect people from other language and culture communities. In this way, teaching in modern foreign languages also makes a contribution to peace education.

(our translation, ISB, www.isb-gym8-lehrplan.de/contentserv/3.1.neu/g8.de/index.php?StoryID=263663 – accessed June 2021)

The Norwegian statement goes, however, one crucial step further, by introducing the idea that language competence is a basis for democratic activity beyond the limits of the country or state:

Good competence in languages will also lay the ground for participation in activities which build democracy *beyond country borders* and differences in culture.

(Our (literal) translation – emphasis added) (www.udir.no/kl06/PSP1-01/Hele/Formaal – accessed March 2017)

The characteristics of internationalism are appearing with ever stronger emphasis in foreign language teaching policy documents: the importance

of (humanistic) values and understanding others, the critical reflection on one's own self and country, the developing link with education for (active) citizenship and participation in democratic processes which go beyond the borders of the nation and state. It is this more complex understanding of democracy which foreign language education can embrace, leaving the specifics of civic education – knowledge about democratic processes, types of representation and so on – to other places in the curriculum.

We can thus offer a normative view of internationalism to give direction to all teaching including FLE. Internationalism involves:

- Recognition of the benefits of globalization because it provides the conditions for cooperation at all societal levels, be they governmental, employment-related, educational or leisure-orientated;
- The pursuit, through cooperation, of understanding, peace and prosperity for all partners equally; and
- The implementation of democratic processes and democratic humanism, based on Human Rights, through which equality in cooperation can be assured.

In terms of curricula and curriculum design, internationalism involves:

- A pluralist recognition of the existence of many disciplines and traditions of teaching all of which may be included in the curriculum; and
- The implementation of teaching processes which give equal voice to all involved and a rational, democratic approach to solving problems.

It is important to note the significance of “equality in cooperation” to counter-act the dominance of “Westernization” which some writers fear (e.g. Jiang, 2008) and wish to reject. “Glocalization” is not the only option, provided the education systems of “Western” states make an effort to understand others and include them in the education of their students.

It is equally important that, although there could be a rejection of the importance of “democracy” and “human rights” as “Western” phenomena, their acceptance in some form is widespread enough (Gearty, 2008) – in “East”, “West”, “South” and “North” – for there to be no significant problem in their being fundamental to internationalism.⁸ The specific form they take will be the outcome of the cooperative work done by all actors involved.

Criticality and Intercultural Citizenship

Foreign Language Education which includes teaching for Intercultural Communicative Competence necessarily involves a focus on “others” who speak another language and live within or beyond “our” national

boundaries, comparative analysis of “our” situation and “theirs”, and criticality or “critical cultural awareness” (Byram, 2021, p. 66):

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.

Citizenship education within the usual context of state or national education includes engaging learners in “active citizenship” and some form of “action in the community” (Himmelmann, 2006). The two can become complementary so that education for democracy is not focused only on national citizenship and identification with a nation or state, but also on a transnational perspective, on activity in a community which is transformed by that transnational perspective, and an identification with internationalism. This is what we call “intercultural citizenship”, which is not a matter of learning “for later life” as is often assumed about much of education but for taking action in the “here and now”, and the “here” is a transnational community.⁹

For combining the two approaches leads to the creation of “transnational communities” – which may be more or less permanent – and these become the basis of political action/action in the world. Five levels of engagement are identified in work where learners engage with others in a “lived” community (Byram, 2008, p. 212–213).

Pre-political:

- 1 Learners engage with others (through documents and artefacts or “in person”, which might be face-to-face or virtual) and reflect critically on their own assumptions, and those of the other;
- 2 Learners engage with others, reflect critically and propose/imagine possible alternatives and changes.

Political:

- 3 Learners engage with others seeking their perspective/advice, reflect critically, propose change and take action to instigate change in their own society;
- 4 Learners create with others a transnational community, reflect together, propose and instigate change in their respective societies;
- 5 In a transnational community, learners from two or more societies identify an issue which they act upon as a transnational group.

The action that is taken may be transnational or it may be, and usually is, in a local community but, in both cases, it has been transformed by the transnational experience and designed with an internationalist purpose.

The purposes and structures of education for intercultural citizenship have been formulated as a number of “axioms and characteristics” which can be used both as an approach to planning and as criteria for evaluating the degree of intercultural citizenship education already present in existing education systems (Alred et al., 2006).

The axioms define what being intercultural entails and the characteristics are what might be expected in education in any form which helps people to think about their experience and to determine how they should respond to it.

Axioms

- intercultural experience takes place when people from different social groups with different cultures (values, beliefs and behaviours) meet;
- “being intercultural” involves analysis and reflection about intercultural experience, and acting on that reflection;
- intercultural citizenship experience takes place when people of different social groups and cultures engage in social and political activity;
- intercultural democratic experience take place when people of different social groups and cultures engage in democratic social and political activity – not avoiding values and judgements
- intercultural citizenship education involves:
 - causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, and analysis and reflection on it (and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity, where “political” is taken in broad sense to mean activity which involves working with others to achieve an agreed end);
 - creating learning/change in the individual: cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change; change in self-perception/spirituality; change in relationships with Others, i.e. people of different social groups; change which is based in the particular but is related to the universal.

Characteristics of education for intercultural citizenship

- A comparative (juxtaposition) orientation in activities of teaching and learning, e.g. juxtaposition of political processes (in the classroom, school ... country ...) and a critical perspective which questions assumptions through the process of juxtaposition;

- Emphasis on becoming conscious of working with Others (of a different group and culture) through (a) processes of comparison/juxtaposition and (b) communication in a language (L1 or L2/3/) which influences perceptions and which emphasizes the importance of learners becoming conscious of multiple identities;
- Creating a community of action and communication which is supra-national and/or composed of people of different beliefs, values and behaviours which are potentially in conflict – without expecting conformity and easy, harmonious solutions;
- Having a focus and range of action which is different from that which is available when not working with Others, where “Others” refers to all those of whatever social group who are initially perceived as different, members of an out-group which influences perceptions and which emphasises the importance of learners becoming conscious of multiple identities;
- Emphasizing becoming aware of one’s existing identities and opening options for social identities additional to the national and regional etc. (e.g. the formation of perhaps temporary supra-national group identities through interaction with Others);
- Paying equal attention to cognition/knowledge, affect/attitude, behaviors/skill;
- All of the above with a conscious commitment to values (i.e. rejecting relativism), being aware that values sometimes conflict and are differently interpreted, but being committed, as citizens in a community, to cooperation (Alred et al., 2006, pp. 233–234).

Criticality is formulated in the work of Barnett (1997) who identifies three domains and four levels for criticality:

THREE DOMAINS

- Propositions, ideas and theories – i.e. what learners learn about the world (in formal education what they learn in their “subjects”);
- The internal world, that is oneself, a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical self-reflection – i.e. what learners think about themselves as individuals;
- The external world, a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical action – i.e. what learners *do* as a result of their thinking and learning.

He also identifies four levels or degrees of criticality – increasingly complex/deep:

FOUR LEVELS:

- Critical skills – reflexivity – refashioning of traditions – transformatory critique.

At the first level the emphasis is on *skills* of learning how to be critical (and “critical”, of course, does not mean “being negative or attacking something/somebody – it means evaluating positive and negative”).

At the second level the skills are *applied* to the knowledge learners have acquired, to their own selves and to the world.

At the third level, the criticality leads to *change* in the sense of modification of what has so far been accepted as “common sense” in knowledge, in oneself, in what we do in the world.

At the fourth level, the change is more *radical* and change is not just modification of what is “common sense” or “taken for granted” but is in fact overturning this and developing something new.

In short, an intercultural citizenship project has the following characteristics:

- Create a sense of internationalist identification with learners in the transnational project;
- Challenge the “common sense” of each national group within the transnational project;
- Develop a new “internationalist” way of thinking *and acting* (a new way which may be either a modification of what is usually done OR a radically new way);
- Apply that new way to “knowledge”, to “self” and to “*the world*”.

Competences for Intercultural and Democratic Culture

The competences which are taught and learnt in transnational work were originally formulated as “intercultural communicative competence” (Byram, 1997/2021). Some elements of this were taken into the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (Council of Europe, 2001) which is widely known in Europe and beyond. It includes some discussion of intercultural and pluricultural competence but it was only later that this aspect was further developed, first through the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Council of Europe, 2009) – in three variations to deal with three kinds of encounter,

face-to-face, through visual media and through the internet – and second through the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) (2018).¹⁰ Despite its title, the latter in fact provides a model of intercultural and democratic competences. It defines competence as:

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.

(Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32)

This means that democratic and intercultural competences are those necessary in “democratic and intercultural situations” respectively and that “In the case of citizens who live within culturally diverse democratic societies, intercultural competence is construed by the Framework as being an integral component of democratic competence” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32). The competences are arranged in a diagram, informally called “the butterfly” (see Figure 6.1):

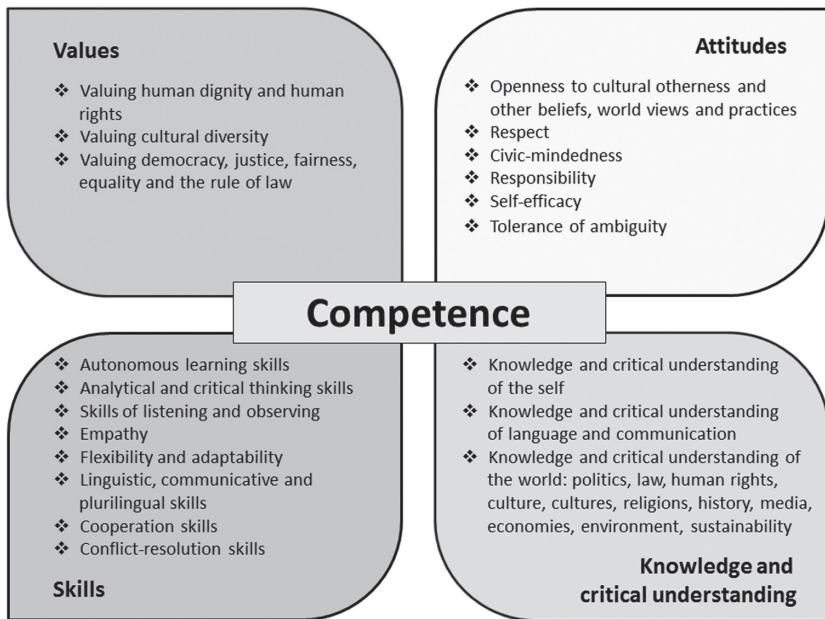


Figure 6.1 The 20 competences included in the RFCDC model (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 38 © Council of Europe, reproduced with permission).

Each competence is then defined in detail, and descriptors at three levels are available for teachers and others to use in planning and assessing teaching and learning.

Educating Plurilingual and Interculturally Competent Democratically Active Citizens

This somewhat cumbersome description of the student we wish to educate has the advantage of summarizing the competences they would ideally have. To this we add the notion of identification with an internationalist perspective. This is our aspiration and serves to guide our thinking. Its realization is a matter of constant development of the pedagogical tools and approaches. Below we describe one such approach, where the focus is on the intercultural, the democratic and the internationalist. Some students used their plurilingual competence and others used English as their first language or as an academic *lingua franca*.

Brief Description of the Project and its Participants

This project was a four-week virtual exchange carried out in June 2020 between students from Universidad Nacional de La Plata in Argentina and the University of Maryland Baltimore County in the USA. Participants in Argentina were 15 second-year students (aged 18–22), enrolled in an *English as a Foreign Language* course that was part of a five-year program for future teachers and/or translators. They had a B2/C1 level of English proficiency 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 programs (Biological Sciences, Business Technology Administration, Health Administration and Policy, Information Systems, Media and Communication Studies, and Psychology) and doing *Introduction to Intercultural Communication* online course. They were all USA nationals (some of them first-generation), with different language backgrounds. (See for more detailed description Porto, Golubeva & Byram 2021.)

By the time the students engaged in the intercultural virtual exchange, they had been staying under COVID-19 lockdown for more than two months. Their responses to a pre-project survey revealed it was affecting all of them to various degrees.

The project had two aims: help students channel trauma and suffering associated with COVID-19 through collaborative artistic multimodal creations; and lead to personal and social transformation.

There were six project stages. During the first week, the participants completed a pre-project survey (*baseline stage*); and then individually researched and collected examples of artistic representations of the

pandemic in their countries (*research stage*). Both classes were divided into small groups, within which the students shared their corpora and reflections. This was followed by jointly creating an artwork accompanied by a group report (*awareness raising stage*).

For the second week of the project, the students were put in mixed Argentinian/US groups, in which they shared their creations and discussed the discomforting content and associated emotions (*dialogue stage*). According to Holland et al. (2011, p. 75), arts integration has the potential “to teach students a great deal about empathy, tolerance, and community”. During the following two weeks, the mixed groups collaboratively designed an arts-based creation (Vecchio, Dhillon & Ulmer, 2017), intended to channel personal feelings, emotions and thoughts that would make a contribution to the global and/or their local community in connection with the COVID-19 crisis. They then composed an “artistic statement” that explained their process of creation.

As the next step, they were requested to seek an outlet for their artwork, i.e. to go beyond the virtual classroom (via their social network, blogs, etc.) and carry out an awareness-raising campaign about the emotional dangers of the pandemic, as a result of which they wrote group reports about their experience (*action stage*).

At the end of the fourth week, students were invited to complete the post-project survey (*reflection stage*), which among others included questions on their perception of the importance of the competences for democratic culture as defined in the RFCDC model described above (Council of Europe, 2018).

Our Analysis and Findings

As researchers as well as teachers, we analyzed the process retrospectively. Data comprised artistic multimodal creations designed by the mixed groups, group reports and individual survey responses. Our qualitative content analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Krippendorff, 2004; Roller, 2019) shows that such virtual collaboration can serve as a possible approach to develop students’ ability to “mobilize and deploy” RFCDC values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or critical understanding (Council of Europe, 2018, Vol. 1, p. 32) in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the challenges of similar crises to the COVID-19 pandemic and use them as an opportunity for personal and social transformation.

Our findings, presented in the form of *four propositional statements*, summarize the humanistic role of such virtual exchanges that contributes to the formation of *plurilingual-and-interculturally competent democratically active citizens*. Our pedagogical intervention, albeit lasting only four weeks, contributed to the fostering of *intercultural, democratic* and *internationalist* perspectives and *plurilingual* awareness:

- (1) Students used a variety of languages (including their first languages) to do the project tasks in the academic setting [= *the plurilingual focus*];
- (2) They engaged with perspectives different from their own by interacting with their international peers and engaging in collaborative work [= *the intercultural focus*];
- (3) They took action in their communities [= *the democratically active citizen focus*];
- (4) They developed a sense of togetherness which stimulated them to create openings for empathy, solidarity and hope arising from their engagement with the theme emotionally and artistically [= *the internationalist focus*].

Below we offer some examples from our project that provide evidence for these four propositional statements.

One mixed nationality group created a short TikTok video that illustrates these four foci. The students addressed the themes of emotional discomfort, uncertainty, anxiety and despair (“scared of the possibility of not surviving the virus”), through impersonating the roles of a patient (“Will I get better?”, “I hope I don’t infect my family as well”), an old person (“I’m afraid to get the disease and die”), an unemployed person (“Will I get my job back?”), a student (“Am I going to have a graduation?”), and a healthcare worker (“I’ve been working nonstop”). In this way, they placed themselves in the shoes of these people and this is evidence of the *intercultural focus*, echoed in their group report, in which they explained they wished to “reach different groups of people” and “show different realities that many people are going through at this difficult time (from a sick person to someone with financial problems)”. In the second part of the video, they started smiling and they adopted a new greeting gesture advised during the pandemic, the elbow bumping, “as a way to show that the lack of contact does not mean we cannot stay in touch or work together” (from group report).

In addition to English, the students used a variety of other languages (Farsi, Hindi, Italian and Spanish) to convey their message that “without holding hands, we are together”. As each student in this group spoke at least two languages, they decided that “it would be a great idea to translate the statement to reach as many people as possible” (from group report) and this is evidence of the *plurilingual focus*. They demonstrated their awareness of different harsh realities and their empathy towards people suffering from the COVID-19 crisis (*intercultural focus*) and, at the same time, they spread positivity: they added to the image of the world map the motto “Whole World will fight together” and finished their video by adding the hashtags: #wearetogether#, #unitywins#, thus strengthening the sense of togetherness, solidarity and hope. This illustrates the *internationalist perspective* and the students’ acting as responsible citizens. The following extract from their group report reveals

this sense of togetherness (“bring people together”) as the basis for solidarity (“help each other”) and hope (“give everyone a ‘voice’ and send a positive message worldwide”):

The most important idea to get across is, for us, the concept of *togetherness*. Our video aims to create a sense of belonging, bring people together, and *encourage them to help each other*. In times of crisis, everybody should be taken into account, since the pandemic/quarantine has affected us in some way or another. That’s why we didn’t focus on any kind of age-group, we wanted to reach as many as possible, *give everyone a “voice”* and send a *positive message worldwide*.

(Group report, emphasis added)

The students based their attempt at transformation through their video on their desire to “reach as many people as possible”, to “record a video showing different perspectives”, and to “work together” on their understanding that “the only way to get out of this is by staying away, yet together” (from group report).

In the post-project survey, students were requested to reflect on their role as citizens during the times of the COVID-19 pandemic and whether they decided to take any civic/social action as a result of this collaboration [*the democratically active citizen focus*, and also in some cases *the plurilingual* one]. The US students mainly planned awareness-raising acts which is one kind of civic or social action. Four of them went further with more concrete plans (to participate in community service; to share medical information on the virus and vaccine status in their community; to distribute masks, water, snacks and hand sanitizers to protesters; or to donate food). For most Argentinian students, their plans consisted of translating for their family members and friends the information posted during the project on Instagram; helping people who are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic (e.g. doing shopping for elderly; donating food and warm clothes for the homeless, or helping children in the outskirts of the city with school subjects). Such examples of civic and social action demonstrate that competences for democratic culture are mobilized and deployed not all at once, but in clusters, “depending on the particular social context encountered” (Council of Europe, 2018, Vol. 1, p. 30). For instance, one of the US-based students planned to share medical information on the virus and vaccine status with his friends. During this planned activity he would most likely “mobilize and deploy” several competences, to name just the most evident ones: *responsibility; empathy; linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills; knowledge and critical understanding of the world*. Another student, from Argentina, planned to donate food and warm clothes. During this activity she would most likely mobilize *empathy* and *valuing human dignity*, among others.

Numerous post-project survey responses demonstrated change in students' self-perception in terms of plurilingual awareness, intercultural and civic growth, and internationalist perspective. As a result of this virtual collaboration, they viewed themselves as better communicators, someone who is able and knows how to help others in the times of crisis. They reported that “the project gave some kind of purpose”, “improved [their] skills” and “broadened [their] horizons” (from post-project survey).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that all education, including foreign language education in particular, can and should take an *internationalist perspective*, because it gives learners an Archimedean leverage from which to view the world” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 275), and their own nation and country within it. Moreover, we have shown what constitutes intercultural language-and-citizenship education, and how to realize in practice the intercultural education axioms and characteristics in order to develop *plurilingual-and-interculturally competent democratically active citizens* in the context of a virtual exchange at higher education level.¹¹

The study reported in this chapter has shown that combining intercultural citizenship education (Byram, 2008; Byram and Golubeva, 2020; Byram et al., 2017, etc.) with internationalist perspectives (Byram, 2018) and a plurilingual orientation (Council of Europe, 2020) creates opportunities for openings to individual and social transformation, and the mobilization of competences for democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2018). Such a pedagogical approach offers opportunities for action-oriented civic learning, and simultaneously opens possibilities for addressing discomfort, stress and negative emotions caused by a crisis similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to do so in a productive way that has the potential to contribute to personal and social transformation in terms of intercultural and civic growth.

The activities undertaken by the Argentinian and US university students may seem to be quite modest. However, as Martin, Hanson and Fontaine (2007) suggest, even “small acts” are able to transform “social relations in ways that have the potential to foster social change” if they are properly theorized (p. 79). We believe that this virtual exchange helped the participants to discover and to experience in practice how they can engage their emotions in a productive and positive way as transformative forces.

Furthermore, through exploring in mixed groups how trauma associated with COVID-19 can be represented in artistic multimodal creations, our Argentinian students not only cultivated a sense of *internationalist identification* with Americans in the transnational project, but they also adopted an *internationalist* way of *thinking* and *acting*. Instead of demonstrating extreme patriotism and/or chauvinism which is typically

called into service by nationalist governments in the times of crisis, like this pandemic, our students experienced openings to *empathy*, *solidarity* and *hope*. Despite the fact that most of the governmental measures worldwide were isolating “us” from “them”, both physically and emotionally, the students were able to deploy their critical thinking skills and civic-mindedness and promoted *togetherness* and an *internationalist* agenda in their artistic multimodal products. The best evidence that our educational approach is capable of bringing “humanism” in higher education is the recognition demonstrated by the students that the pandemic is a global problem, that it affects all of us and should be addressed as a joint effort of the global community. This outcome was possible because the project involved cooperative work done by all participants, and our students had an opportunity to engage with their transnational partners at pre-political and political levels of activity.

To summarize, we have demonstrated how internationalism can be cultivated in a virtual exchange setting, and how articulating one’s emotions and (linguistic) identity through multimodal (and plurilingual) artistic creations and by taking civic/social action, can help educate *plurilingual-and-interculturally competent democratically active citizens*. We are aware that a four-week project is too short to mobilize and deploy all 20 competences for democratic culture, but we believe that it empowers students in intercultural (citizenship) learning; shows them how empathy and solidarity can (and should be) action-oriented; and contributes to enriching higher education with humanistic perspectives.

Notes

- 1 As I (Byram) write this and open today’s newspapers, there are revelations of domestic political scandals in Britain, and of the internationally significant scandal of genocide of the Uighurs by the Chinese government.
- 2 An exception is Kedourie (1966, p. 84) but his statement is extreme and perhaps deliberately provocative: “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”.
- 3 Furthermore, they represent a particular view of the national, especially in the “national history”, which is contested by minorities, both “old” and “new”. At the time of writing, the “Black Lives Matter” movement is trying to persuade the authorities to include the history of slavery in the English national curriculum.
- 4 Two extracts from Wikipedia illustrate this. The French version says, of the law relating pressure and volume of gases:

La loi de Boyle-Mariotte ou loi de Mariotte, souvent appelée loi de Boyle dans le monde anglo-saxon, du nom du physicien et chimiste irlandais Robert Boyle et de l’abbé physicien et botaniste français Edme Mariotte, est l’une des lois de la thermodynamique constituant la loi des gaz parfaits. Elle relie la pression et le volume d’un gaz parfait à température constante.

The English version reads as follows:

Boyle's law, also referred to as the Boyle–Mariotte law, or Mariotte's law (especially in France), is an experimental gas law that describes how the pressure of a gas tends to increase as the volume of the container decreases.

- 5 Much the same process happens in the media to create a sense that nationalism is normal and even “banal” (Billig, 1995)
- 6 The nearest formulation to this perspective is found in the European Commission's White Paper of 1995 in which it is said that “Multilingualism is part and parcel of both European identity/citizenship and the learning society” (p. 47) (europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com95_590_en.pdf – accessed October 24, 2017)
- 7 Taken from the ephemeral world of the internet, this document no longer seems to exist but its message is important. www.udir.no/kl06/PSP1-01/Hele/Formaal – accessed March 2017
- 8 It would be possible at this point to enter and analyse the debate about cultural relativism and universalism and the universality of human rights in particular, but it would be too long a digression for the space available and readers may wish to pursue this with, for example, Santos (2014).
- 9 We are using “transnational” here to refer to communities whose members may be in different countries or within the same country. Our example will be of the former kind, but the latter is equally important. Such communities can be “lived” or “imagined” (Anderson, 1991) as a consequence of work within and beyond the classroom. The example we give will be of a “lived” community as students in two countries interact in real and virtual time via the internet. In other examples, students may have access to pedagogical materials which help them to envisage an imagined transnational community.
- 10 The *Companion Volume for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020) provides descriptors for “pluricultural competences” some of which are taken from intercultural competence, but the RFCDC is nearer to our purposes and will be our focus here.
- 11 Previous studies showed this approach can effectively work in other than higher education settings (see the collection of virtual telecollaborations in Byram et al., 2017 volume).

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