

LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR INTERCULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by placing my cards on the table. The purpose of this paper is to make an argument. I want to present certain views of what the purposes of language teaching *should* be and I am sure from my research on the way language teachers think about these matters in two European countries – England and Denmark (Byram & Risager, 1999) – that my views are shared by many teachers who nonetheless find themselves being obliged to practise differently from what they believe.

In brief, the argument can be put like this:

- For both instrumental and educational reasons, language teaching must involve teaching both linguistic and cultural competence
- Whereas linguistic competence *might* be modelled on a native speaker – this is debatable – cultural competence should be modelled differently, and the term ‘intercultural speaker’ encapsulates this
- Intercultural speakers have competences which enable them to mediate / interpret the values, beliefs and behaviours (the ‘cultures’) of themselves and of others and to ‘stand on the bridge’ or indeed ‘be the bridge’ between people of different languages and cultures.

It can also be argued that the intercultural speaker should be encouraged to become actively involved in the societies which they mediate, to become an ‘intercultural citizen’, but this argument will be pursued in my seminar in order not to break the limits of a lecture.

Lectures are a very special genre and one of the most difficult for the listeners - and the most easy and enjoyable for the lecturer. It is difficult in a lecture to make an abstract argument, and it is certainly difficult to make an abstract argument in an interesting way. So, rather than make the abstract argument – which is more appropriate for the written mode of communicating, in a book for example (Byram, forthcoming) – I will present some illustrations of the key ideas.

First of all, I will explain what I mean by the intercultural speaker, by comparing and contrasting such speakers with a bicultural person. Second I will discuss the instrumental and educational purposes of language teaching. Third I will give an example of teaching which illustrates how a teacher can develop learners’ intercultural competence.

BEING BICULTURAL AND ACTING INTERCULTURALLY

BEING BICULTURAL

We all have many identities through which we interact with other people. At the moment of this lecture it is our professional identities which are dominant: you see me as a professor, I see you as teachers, and we see each other as language people. On another occasion we might talk in terms of our national identities and exchange ideas about our ways of life, or our governments, or our cricket teams. However, when we get to know each other, it might be our more individual and personal characteristics which become prominent in our interaction and conversation, and our social identities will be less evident.

Empirical work in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) shows how individuals can be influenced by groups, and their personal identity dominated by their group identity. It shows how individuals respond to other individuals in terms of such categorisation; how this leads to comparison and competition which is in turn a basis for self-esteem. When a person's group is successful in competition with others, the person's self-esteem is increased. Group membership can be created artificially, as experiments have shown (Sherif & Sherif, 1969) but it is usually a result of the process of socialisation. One is socialised into being a boy or a girl, into being a teacher, into a national identity and so on.

Most of the groups to which an individual belongs complement each other: one can be a member of a golf club and a football club, of a school and a family, although there may be some degree of conflict in the cultures involved (some families do not accept all the beliefs, values and behaviours that a school expects of the children of the family). Others are mutually exclusive: one cannot be a member of two rival football supporters' clubs, or at least not openly so. Where one is a member of rival groups, for example someone with two nationalities, there will be situations in which one needs to keep silent about membership of one whilst claiming membership of the other.

Where people from two social groups interact and are in competition, they force each other to act in terms of their identification with one or the other group. This is problematic for people who would like to belong to more than one group but are forced to choose by people who perceive the groups as mutually exclusive, and therefore the identities associated with them as mutually exclusive. This is very evident when the groups are nation-states at war (as was evident in the former Yugoslavia as families were torn apart by rival national/ethnic identities), or when football teams and their supporting groups meet (as happens regularly in my region when Newcastle and Sunderland meet).

When one group is dominant, it can force individuals into the category of a low-status minority group and this can have a detrimental effect on the self-esteem of the individuals if they accept the dominant group's definition of them. This is one of the worst effects of colonialism in the past and in the present.

All this applies to any social group but let me take the particular question of the national/ethnic group. Membership of ethnic national groups has to be either mutually exclusive or, if an individual wishes to be in two (or more) groups, they have to manage this carefully, since most members of an ethnic group are mono-ethnic and tolerate poorly the presence of 'hybrids'.

My illustrations are taken from South Tyrol, Italy, where young people who are bilingual, born of one parent from the German minority and one from the Italian majority, have difficulty because people in both groups assume that one is either German or Italian, with both

M. Byram: keynote address

parents from the same ethnic group, and that 'mixed' parentage is problematic and best avoided.

The first quotation shows the power of other-ascription: other children will not allow anyone to be both German and Italian, and it is the language which is seen as the symbol of ethnicity:

Was it difficult to become bilingual?

I would say that I haven't had any particular problems in the languages, but with the (other) children. Because I was in the German school, they looked on me as if I was an Italian, and in the Italian school they considered me to be German.

So the tactic for the person with adequate linguistic competence is to pass as a member of the group with whom one is interacting at a given moment:

Because I was always quite good in both languages. If I was in German groups, I spoke German, and they didn't notice that I was an Italian, and have an Italian mother, and if I was among Italians, they always thought that I'm Italian. So I never had difficulties (Egger, 1985, p. 178 – my translation).

So what this tells us is that these young people have no problem with linguistic competence – they are bilingual. The problem they have is that people around them do not allow them to belong to both groups, to be bi-ethnic or bi-national or bicultural. They have to pretend that they are mono-ethnic, mono-national and mono-cultural.

Another example comes from the wonderful book called 'Lost in Translation' – not the film which stole the title – in which Eva Hoffmann describes her life as a 12 year old Polish girl emigrating to Canada. She and her sister have just been given new versions of their Polish names which are easier to pronounce for the teacher:

We make our way to a bench at the back of the room; nothing much has happened, except a small, seismic mental shift. The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us – but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes and hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. We walk to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves (Hoffman, 1989, p. 105).

What is common to both these cases is that the people in question are in a low status position with little power and have to accept what other people tell them they are, the identity other people give them. Hoffman's experience as described in the rest of her book suggests that she never felt quite at ease with the new set of values, beliefs and behaviours despite spending most of her life there.

In another example, the person has a much higher status, as a well known medical doctor but even he says that ultimately there is a deep level of identity in which he makes a choice. The researcher analysed the life of this person, a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, in terms of a five-stage model of bicultural identity, leading ultimately to 'integration', defined as follows:

M. Byram: keynote address

A secure, integrated identity with the ability to function effectively in both cultures. In addition, they understand the meanings behind various cultural values, beliefs, expectations, and practices of which they are a part (Garrett, 1996, p. 18).

The description which the interviewee offers in his own words suggests very explicitly that a person can hold within themselves two cultural, ethnic identities and, because he gained acceptance by both groups – as a highly regarded medical doctor – it seems that being two people is not difficult for him but there are still the problems Eva Hoffmann experienced too:

I think who I am, is that I truly am two people, matter of fact. Doc Amoneeta Sequoyah used to call me 'Gagoyoti' in other words 'two people'. In Cherokee, that's a way of saying, well you're this and you're that. For me a lot of my conflicts in earlier years were because I wasn't sure who I was. Was I Indian, was I white, you know, what was a mixture of person, where did I belong? I knew deep down inside, I didn't belong with that class of people who felt they were better than others. And I knew that the people I came from, the Cherokees, there was something very special (Garrett, 1996, p. 18).

Despite the successful outcome, this person, too, had experienced conflict and a sense of not knowing where he belonged. Again this is bound up with how other people, especially the dominant majority group, attribute an identity to the individual whether the individual wishes it or not.

There is much more to say about being bicultural although it also has to be said that the research is not widespread - there are mountains of research on being bilingual but very little on being bicultural.

ACTING INTERCULTURALLY

Being bicultural is not the same as acting interculturally. To act interculturally is to bring into a relationship two cultures, the values beliefs and behaviours of two groups of people. This can be the cultures of nations and this is what interests us most as language teachers, but it can be any two social groups. One of the outcomes of teaching languages and cultures should be the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other – in terms of similarities and differences – and to act as mediator between them, or more precisely between people socialised into them. This also includes 'mediating' between oneself and others, that is, being able to take an 'external' perspective on oneself as one interacts with others and to analyse and, where desirable, adapt one's behaviour and underlying values and beliefs. Thus at any given point in time, individuals are bringing into contact through themselves two sets of values, beliefs and behaviours, and in this sense there is almost always a binary relationship.

So the phrase 'intercultural *speaker*' can be paraphrased as an 'intercultural mediator', although the emphasis on speaker is useful because it keeps the link with language, and the implication that mediation pre-supposes some linguistic competence. The relationship between language and the shared values, beliefs and behaviours in a social group is complex and much debated, but it is undoubtedly close. As a consequence, the best mediators are those who have an understanding of the relationship between, on the one hand, their own language and language varieties and their own culture and cultures of different social groups in their society, and, on the other hand, the language (varieties) and culture(s) of others, between (inter) which they find themselves acting as mediators.

M. Byram: keynote address

The phrase 'acting as mediator' is important. It distinguishes 'intercultural' from 'bicultural' since being bicultural need not involve the act of mediating. In most case, bicultural people simply live with others through whichever of their cultural identities is appropriate. They might also be asked to mediate, to explain the relationships between two cultures they know, but this is an extra demand for them to become intercultural, and one they may not be able to meet.

We can thus contrast 'being bicultural' with 'acting interculturally', and the ability to act pre-supposes certain attitudes, knowledge and skills which need to be learnt, and much of my own work has been to try to describe what could be the behaviours involved (Byram, 1997). But I will come back to that in the third section.

INSTRUMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

We live in a world of economic globalisation. I think we all have enough of a sense of what this is for me not to have to try to define it, although I am not sure that we know precisely what is happening. There are of course many international companies just as there are increasing numbers of people travelling around the world for business or tourism, and we can see this as an effect of economic globalisation. What we don't know precisely is what effect this is having. Is this experience changing people themselves, or just changing their behaviour? Whatever the answer, is it important for the vast number of people in education systems around the world, who are not in fact involved, who do not go on holiday to other countries, who will not have a job which takes them to other countries or requires them to speak a foreign language?

For example, there is a major effort taking place to teach English in China. Reasons given are that China joined the WTO, that China has the Beijing Olympics, that China will be, or already is, a major economic power. All this is true, but how many Chinese will be involved in using their English in globalised trade or in playing host to the Olympics? Only a tiny percentage of the vast population.

Yet the phenomenon of globalisation and the usefulness of languages for international trade, and the career opportunities this seems to offer, have come to dominate many education systems. It coincides with the turn towards communication and the teaching of communicative skills which was mainly a consequence of developments internal to language teaching and was undoubtedly an improvement in methodology. However, the new methodology also had an effect which is problematic. It led to the justification of language teaching for instrumental purposes as the main and sometimes the only purpose, and this is a mistake. If, for example, the only reason for teaching English in China were to support the Chinese economy it would not, I suspect, justify the expenditure involved, and once that is realised, politicians may well begin to ask why everyone should learn a foreign language.

One certain and visible effect of globalisation is increase in the number of multicultural societies. Britain has become such a society in one generation. In the town where I was brought up, I never met any foreigners or heard anything but English. Today in that same town you see people of many ethnic origins and hear many languages. Such societies are exciting and fascinating places to live, but they are also difficult and challenging. There are problems which, as usual, educationists are expected to solve. The most recent response from politicians in Britain and other European countries is to introduce citizenship education with the hope that this will create a more harmonious society. The Council of Europe is this year celebrating a Year of Citizenship through Education.

What we have largely left behind are the small and closed societies, where everyone knows everyone else as an individual. Every individual has interactions with others in several roles.

M. Byram: keynote address

The postman is also your neighbour, and he is also the person you meet in the café or at the church. You have complex relationships with small numbers of people. This is village life, the village 'community' (Tonnies, 1887/1963), and villages still exist, in the countryside but also sometimes in towns.

In contrast to this, in multicultural and globalised places, we live in 'societies' where we know the postman only as the postman, and even then it is never the same one. We are also increasingly living in societies where interactions are across frontiers. If I make a phone call to complain about my electricity bill, the person who speaks to me is Indian, and lives in India. The electricity company has an answering service in another continent and the person who answers will have been given an anglo-saxon name and trained to know about anglo-saxon current events, so that they can chat about things I am familiar with and make me feel comfortable. In this kind of society, we cannot know many individuals as individuals and we find ourselves responding to other people's apparent identities.

My point is that in such societies, people cannot simply rely on linguistic skills. For, in these societies, people do not just communicate with each other, they interact. They do not just exchange information, they interpret each other and try to understand each other, each other's identities, real or assumed. The effect of globalisation is that the number and variety of people an individual interacts with has much increased. The number of social identities and social roles we have has created more complex interactions.

So people need more than linguistic or communicative competence, they need intercultural competence too. They need to be intercultural speakers for instrumental reasons, to be successful in complex multilingual and multicultural societies.

The question is whether language teachers, who have in the last few decades justified their teaching in terms of the usefulness of speaking foreign languages, can actually give learners what they need. Here is a list of competences produced by analysing successful people in international NGOs, businesses and similar organisations. I have selected only some points from the model as a whole (Koehn & Rosenau, 2002) as it would take too long to deal with all of it:

Analytic competence

- Understanding of the central beliefs, values, practices, and paradoxes of other culture(s) and society(ies) – including political and ethnic awareness
- Ability to link other-country conditions to one's own circumstances and vice versa [to make comparisons in order better to understand]

Emotional competence

- Motivation and ability to open oneself up continuously to divergent cultural influences and experiences
- Ability to assume genuine interest in, and to maintain respect for different (especially others') values, traditions, experiences and challenges (i.e., intercultural/transnational empathy).

Creative/imaginative competence

- Collaborative ability to articulate novel and shared transnational synthesis [of ideas, plans, activities]
- Ability to envision viable mutually acceptable alternatives
- Ability to tap into diverse cultural sources for inspiration

M. Byram: keynote address

Behavioural competence, Communicative fluency

- Proficiency in and use of others' spoken/written language
- Skill in interpretation and in using an interpreter
- Proficiency in and relaxed use of interculturally appropriate nonverbal cues and codes
- Ability to avoid and resolve communication misunderstandings across diverse communication styles.

Functional (project/task) adroitness

- Ability to relate to others and to develop and maintain positive interpersonal relationships
- Ability to overcome problems/conflicts and accomplish goals when dealing with transnational challenges and globalisation/localisation, pressures.

This is a model or an ideal of the interculturally competent person, and it is striking for language teachers like us to see that language skills are only one aspect and may even be *replaced* by the 'skill in using an interpreter'. This is as important as language skills in international business or diplomatic or other affairs but is this a skill that language people have, and is it a skill that language teachers teach in the classroom? Do we teach 'ability to overcome problems/conflicts and accomplish goals...' or 'creative/imaginative competence'? If our aims were truly instrumental then we would have to do so if we are to meet the needs of people experienced in working under conditions of globalisation.

On the other hand, someone who has such instrumental competences is also someone who is better able to interact with others not just in order to get things done. That person is also someone who appreciates and understands people from other languages and cultures, someone who sees them not as outsiders, as 'foreigners' but as people with whom they can live together - and learning to 'live together' is the biggest challenge created by globalisation (Delors, 1996). The distinction between 'us' and 'them' which is used to justify social conflict of all kinds, including war and genocide, has to be overcome and language teachers can make a contribution to this. This is what I mean by the educational purposes of language teaching. They overlap with instrumental purposes but there has to be a much more analytical and reflexive dimension. There has to be an ability to decentre, to stand back from what we take for granted. This means that language learners should learn as much about themselves and their own society as they do about other people and their languages and societies.

Let me summarise what I have been saying in this second section. There are three related points:

- First, I'm saying that interaction with people of other languages is more complex than simply an exchange of information using the linguistic and communicative skills which we normally focus upon in our teaching
- Second, the reasons for the emphasis on instrumental purposes are not sufficient to justify language teaching in general education – it would not justify the enormous effort and expense – and therefore we need to emphasise the educational aims and combine them with the instrumental
- Third, I am saying that language teachers need to include intercultural competence in their teaching.

M. Byram: keynote address

I am aware that this is demanding and I remember one inspector of languages in France saying that we must not 'surcharger la barque' – overload the boat – but I think we must make sure that the boat has got the right load in it before it sets sail. Hymes (1972) famously said that linguistic competence is not enough, people need sociolinguistic competence, knowing what to say to whom, when and where and about what. But Hymes was talking about people in the same speech community, the same culture. I think that speakers of foreign languages need a different kind of competence, an intercultural competence, as well as a linguistic competence. Let me give you an example of how this can be done, in my third section.

AN EXAMPLE

There are a number of books, written for example by Kramersch (1993), Lo Bianco and Crozet (1999), Corbett (2003), which demonstrate practice. I will describe briefly one example from a collection where the teachers have, in varying degrees, built up their objectives and methods explicitly on the basis of a definition of intercultural competence I have proposed. It is an example I often use because it is possible to describe it briefly and it covers most of the elements of intercultural competence:

BRITISH AND BULGARIAN CHRISTMAS CARDS: A RESEARCH PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

Krassimira Topuzova (Bulgaria)

In Byram et al. (Eds.). (2001). *Intercultural competence in practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Foreign language school - 5-year course in English, French and German
'elitist' : advanced language teaching - students above average, age 14 to 19
class consisted of 26 students at the age of 17-18 and it was their fourth year of studying English.

Background of the project - political

Governments replaced, economy reconstructed, education and media undergone changes.

Celebrations and habits started to change: e.g., new celebration: St. Valentine

Christmas more commercialised, new symbols: mistletoe, turkey, presents -
Christmas cards have started to change.

Aims were:

- show whether Bulgarian Christmas tradition has changed
- compare with British tradition and introduce other cultural issues
- 'research': analysing data, form concepts, draw conclusions.

M. Byram: keynote address

- a. each student to go to a shop and buy one Christmas card they'd like to post for Christmas.
- b. in shop, observe: who buys cards - age, sex, nationality - how many do they buy - which cards sell more and which less?
- c. school, exhibited cards and explained why he/she had bought a particular card: price, size or colour OR images and messages.
- d. groups of 5/6 in order to analyse the cards.

WHO BUYS CHRISTMAS CARDS?

1. What age, sex, occupation are they?
2. Are they local people or tourists?
3. How many cards do they buy?

WHAT CHRISTMAS CARDS?

1. What size and format are they?
2. What images are included?
3. Who printed them?
4. What price are they?
5. What is written on them?
6. Where are they sold?

WHY BUY CHRISTMAS CARDS?

1. What do Christmas cards mean to Bulgarians?
2. Why do they buy them?
3. Who do they send them to?
4. What do they write on them?

Second stage: classification cards into types, according to the images and messages - following types emerged:

Traditional Bulgarian Christmas cards - illustrating the traditional Christmas table with the round bread and coin in it etc.

Religious Christmas cards with Biblical images - connected with the Bible's story of Christ's birth - new development in our country, due to the official rejection of church before the changes.

Children's cards – e.g., depicting children making snowmen, playing with snowballs

Winter-landscape cards -snowy woods or fields

Christmas-tree decorations - typical Bulgarian cards - traditional decorations

M. Byram: keynote address

Third stage: discussion of the cultural implications: traditional Bulgarian Christmas cards haven't changed; recently introduced innovations, e.g., UNICEF cards with 'Merry Christmas' in English

Comparisons

- brainstormed expectations about British Christmas cards: write one or two questions about British cards
- distribute British cards to groups: analyse as before - four types: religious cards, winter-season cards, children's cards, Christmas decorations.
- comparative analysis of the Bulgarian and British Christmas cards; make two columns: for differences and for similarities; summarise the findings.
- most striking difference: information on cards: what charity and what material made of.

Comment

Students found it difficult to accept the idea of buying Christmas cards to support a charity. This is a very interesting point of cultural difference that the students raised. The concept of charity didn't exist in our culture before 1989. Under communist rule people were 'ideally' equal - we got equal wages, we had equal rights and obligations. There were literally no starving people. It was a 'classless' society, people had their bread and homes without fear of losing them. We went to the same shops, selling nearly the same things at the same price. Now, ten years later, the concept of charity has emerged with a clear shape and meaning. The 'classless society' has practically become non-existent. Instead, two distinct classes have formed - those of the rich and the poor. Homeless and unemployed people started to appear. At the same time, the first charity organizations appeared, usually founded and sponsored by people with money and power. Probably, this accounts for the fact that some of the Bulgarian cards had a printed price and none of the British had. British cards may have a price either written in pencil or on a stick-on label, which British people always remove before sending them.

At this point we had a discussion on British charities, their role and value in society. The students learned about some of the well-known British charities - the Samaritans, the Salvation Army, Oxfam, etc. They were surprised to find out that these charities got their funds from public donations, not from state or private businesses as is the case in Bulgaria. They explained this by reference to the centralised social service system in our country which is still surviving, though quite neglected by the state due to its financial and economic crisis. However, they came to the conclusion that the charities in Bulgaria would develop in very much the same way as West European charities because of the guidance they received from them, and the expertise they followed in organization and activities.

This example illustrates how a teacher can deliberately promote a number of sub-competences in intercultural competence:

M. Byram: keynote address

- The ability to interpret documents from two cultures and see the relationships between them
- The ability to collect data from a society (in this case their own) and interpret it.
- The ability to analyse critically the assumptions or axiomatic beliefs beneath the surface of cultural phenomena, including their own
- The attitude of openness and inquiry which is fundamental to all the others
- This historical knowledge of another society needed to understand phenomena within it (including their own).

What this example shows is that the teacher is developing from an emphasis on communication and on studying other cultures to an analysis of cultures and a juxtaposition and comparison which produces greater insight.

THE EXAMPLE AND THE THEORY

In a theory of intercultural competence I think we need to develop five competences in learners:

Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

Knowledge about: Christmas cards in England and Bulgaria; recycling; recent history in Bulgaria; the role of charity in capitalist welfare states (and others).

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

Relating/comparing: English and Bulgarian symbols of Christmas; English and Bulgarian concepts of charity.

Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Discovering social practices in Bulgaria (and England) connected with Christmas by investigating/observing/collecting data, categorising data i.e., being scientists.

Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries

M. Byram: keynote address

Evaluating the change in Bulgarian society since the change from communism – the advantages and disadvantages.

Linguistic competence also developed – the lessons were in English!

CONCLUSION

To conclude, let me remind you of what I have been trying to do as I stated at the beginning. I am trying to say what I think language teaching *should* do in our contemporary society - and by this phrase I mean what all developed or so-called first world countries have in common. I do not know if my argument is relevant to other situations but I hope it is.

My argument is this:

First:

- For both instrumental and educational reasons, language teaching must involve teaching linguistic and cultural competence.

There are obvious instrumental reasons for language teaching in a globalised world, but they are not equally relevant to all learners, and educational reasons – the development of an independent and critical person with a capacity for understanding other people from other cultures – remain fundamental to language teaching.

Second:

- Whereas linguistic competence *might* be modelled on a native speaker – this is debatable – cultural competence should be modelled differently, and the term ‘intercultural speaker’ encapsulates this.

The intercultural speaker is someone who acts as mediator, not someone who is bicultural – although bicultural people may also act interculturally – and even if we attempt to develop linguistic, bilingual competences in our learners, we should focus on intercultural competences rather than imitating the cultural competences of native speakers.

Third:

- The intercultural speaker has competences which enable them to mediate/ interpret the values, beliefs and behaviours (the ‘cultures’) of themselves and of others and to ‘stand on the bridge’ or indeed ‘be the bridge’ between people of different languages and cultures.

The methods of developing intercultural competences, of giving ourselves as teachers objectives which include intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence, are being developed by teachers themselves, and I hope what I have said will encourage you to experiment with such methods as are appropriate for your teaching situation.

M. Byram: keynote address

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