

The Educational Value of Foreign Language Learning

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There are increasing indications in Europe, and elsewhere, that the exclusive focus on the instrumental purposes of language learning is giving way to the inclusion of educational purposes, sometimes called 'humanistic'. These aspirations to make language teaching part of liberal education include emphasis on criticality and, in particular, critical cultural awareness: the ability to evaluate critically and self-consciously, the values beliefs and behaviours of other cultural groups and our own (Byram, 1997). In this presentation, I will illustrate and explain how these abstract aspirations can be realised in concrete objectives for language teaching.

I will then go further to explain and illustrate how language teaching can also contribute to citizenship education, by bringing an international dimension to active citizenship (Byram, 2008; Byram, Golubeva, Han and Wagner, 2017). This can be justified as an element of liberal education but is also formulated in at least one national language teaching policy as a significant purpose for language teaching.

The problem area in this educational approach to language teaching has always been the question of assessment, of critical cultural awareness, of intercultural and pluricultural competence. In the final section, I will discuss how this might be done, and refer to recent proposals from the Council of Europe (2017) and the American Council on Foreign Language Teaching (2017).

References:

ACTFLF (2017) ACTFL Can-do Statements.

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