Developing Intercultural Competence by Teaching Literature: Principles and practice from a case-study in two Algerian universities

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of literary texts for intercultural learning using a Master course of English as a foreign language in Algeria as an empirical example. We first define essential concepts that guided this course - 'culture', 'language-culture nexus' and 'intercultural competence' - before we explain the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural context in Algeria, as it is the foundation of the choice of literary texts. The empirical study was an action research project that took place in two universities. We explain the research methodology and teaching methodology in which lessons were planned on the basis of Byram's model (1997) of intercultural communicative competence. In the analysis we draw on the existing literature and extracts from the students' discussions and worksheets to argue for the significance of using literary texts in encouraging 'aesthetic reading' leading to empathetic responses that were significant in developing intercultural communicative competence. Finally, we provide recommendations in terms of theory and practice for teachers and syllabus designers who intend to use literary texts for intercultural learning.

Key words: Intercultural communicative competence, literature and intercultural competence, literary texts in translation, aesthetic reading, empathy, literature teaching.

Résumé

Cette contribution présente une recherche sur l'utilisation de textes littéraires pour l'apprentissage interculturel à partir de l'exemple empirique d'un cours de Master d'anglais langue étrangère en Algérie. Nous définissons en premier lieu les concepts essentiels adoptés pour ce cours : « culture », « lien entre langue et culture » et « compétence interculturelle ». Est présenté ensuite le contexte sociolinguistique et socioculturel à partir duquel a été effectué le choix des textes littéraires. L'étude empirique est un projet d'action-recherche mené dans deux universités. Nous présentons la méthodologie de la recherche et la méthodologie didactique suivie, conçue sur le modèle de compétence communicative interculturelle proposé par Byram (1997). L'analyse prend pour référence à cet égard la littérature existante ainsi que des extraits de débats et d'activités réalisés par les étudiants qui prônent l'importance de l'emploi de textes littéraires qui encouragent la « lecture

esthétique » afin de susciter des réponses empathiques favorisant le développement de la compétence communicative interculturelle. Finalement, nous formulons des recommandations concernant la théorie et la pratique destinées aux enseignants et aux concepteurs de programmes d'études désireux d'employer des textes littéraires pour l'apprentissage interculturel.

Mots clés : compétence communicative interculturelle, littérature et compétence interculturelle, textes littéraires en traduction, lecture esthétique, empathie, enseignement de la littérature.

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza la utilización de textos literarios para el aprendizaje intercultural partiendo de un curso de Máster de inglés lengua extranjera en Argelia como ejemplo empírico. En primer lugar, se definen los conceptos esenciales que sirvieron de guía en dicho curso – "cultura", "nexo entre lengua y cultura" y "competencia intercultural" – antes de exponer el contexto sociolingüístico y sociocultural de Argelia, que fundamentó la selección de los textos literarios. El trabajo empírico se enmarca en un proyecto de acción-investigación realizado en dos universidades. Se presenta la metodología de dicha investigación así como la metodología didáctica aplicada, basada en el modelo de competencia comunicativa intercultural propuesto por Byram (1997). El análisis se apoya en la literatura existente y en extractos de debates y actividades realizados por los alumnos para demostrar la importancia del empleo de textos literarios que promuevan una "lectura estética" que facilite respuestas empáticas que favorezcan a su vez el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural. Finalmente, ofrecemos recomendaciones tanto en lo que atañe a la teoría como a la práctica a profesores y programadores de cursos que pretendan emplear textos literarios para el aprendizaje intercultural.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa intercultural, literatura y competencia intercultural, textos literarios en traducción, lectura estética, empatía, enseñanza de la literatura.

Introduction

THE INTRODUCTION into language teaching of intercultural competence and the notion that learners will acquire intercultural communicative competence is now well established in theoretical writings, and in policy documents in many countries. There have also been writings by teachers on how they realise these ideas in practice (e.g. Byram et al., 2016; Kohler, 2015; Porto, 2018). In many cases, teachers have managed to bring their

learners into contact with learners from other countries through the internet (O'Dowd and Lewis, 2016). This is a relatively new approach and gives an immediacy to the learning process, but it is important to remember that other approaches are well established, including the use of literature (Bredella and Delanoy, 1996; Gonçalves Matos, 2012), and this article focuses on the use of literary texts.

Although the cultural dimension of language teaching is traditionally focused on another country where the language being taught and learnt is widely spoken - and is usually the main language of the country - the rise of the importance of English as a lingua franca and alternatives to traditional approaches (Dervin and Holmes, 2016) has led to new ways of thinking about the learning of intercultural competence. This includes a focus on social groups and their cultures within learners' own countries.

This article discusses the implications of a rationale which embodies this new way of thinking and how it can be realised in practice with the help of literary texts. An example is given from university teaching of English in Algeria in which literature is used as the starting point for stimulating learners' reflections on how to respond to social change and in particular the presence of refugees in their country.

The article draws on a widely used pedagogical model (Byram 1997) for the planning and realisation of a series of lessons in two Algerian universities and uses the model as a means of assessing students' achievement and evaluating the success of the course[1]. It will be shown that, in addition to intended learning, students also manifest behaviour which is not accounted for in the model and that this necessitates drawing upon a more recent pedagogical model

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[1] The distinction between assessment and evaluation is difficult to make in Romance languages; in French for example 'évaluation' is used for both. In English assessment is defined as *'The measurement of a learner's potential for attainment, or of their actual attainment'* (Wallace, 2008) and is generally used to cover all methods of establishing an individual's capacity in some aspect of what they have learnt, irrespective of whether they have learnt as a result of being taught in an educational setting or as a consequence of learning through experience.

Evaluation is defined as *'The measuring of the effectiveness of a lesson, course, or programme of study'* (Wallace, 2008), and is the study and reporting of a phenomenon – in our case an aspect of education – to assist an audience to determine its merit and value. The first is matter of professional standards and the second a matter of societal or individual need.

and the possible addition of other elements to Byram's (1997) original model.

Some essential concepts

Culture and the language-culture nexus

The word 'culture' has long been used in different academic fields, as well as colloquially. Hall (2005, 3) states that:

> *Culture has been defined in hundreds of ways over the years. Each of these definitions highlights different aspects of culture, and many of the definitions even conflict with each other. The risk with so many definitions is that the definition of culture becomes so broad that it means everything, which results in it meaning nothing for practical purposes.*

However, for teachers of languages it has its practical purposes and is part of their vocabulary; provided it is carefully defined, it is useful in pedagogy. Here our purpose is to establish a definition and usage which help in our particular project as well as more widely in language teaching.

Williams (1983, 89), one of the founders of cultural studies in Britain, agrees with Hall's point above, and states that culture *'is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language',* and has been used and hence defined differently over the centuries. The modern view is that culture is dynamic, as argued for example by Barrett et al.:

> *All cultures are dynamic and constantly change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other cultures. Cultures also change over time because of their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group* (2014, 6).

This is a socio-psychological view which sees culture as the shared experience of a group through which individuals' membership of a group is realised. The dynamic nature of 'culture' is due to the political, economic, and historical agendas that keep on changing not least because of the fluidity of group membership and the increased interactions of groups in the contemporary world.

Keesing (1974, 89) considers culture from the perspective of the individual rather than the group and argues that the human brain

– and not just the modes of being of human groups – influences how culture becomes an *'internal reality'*:

> *Culture […] is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates 'internal models of reality'*

Gudykunst and Kim (2003) further argue that communication is shaped and influenced by *'cultural, sociocultural and psycho-cultural'* factors and emphasise that *'it is necessary to point out […] that our cultures influence our communication and that our communication influences our cultures'* (p. 17) and this brings us to the relationship of language and culture.

Risager (2006, Chapter 8) analyses the language-culture nexus from three perspectives. The first two are sociological and psychological:

- a linguistic practice or sociological perspective, where language and culture are separable – people use the same language in different contexts to refer to and express different contents – this is most evident in the use of English and Englishes but is also found in other languages,
- a linguistic resources or psychological perspective where, in the life of the individual person, language and culture or, better, cultural experience, are inseparable for that individual and are ultimately unique to the individual.

It is the second of these which we experience as individuals and which Hoffmann vividly describes in that part of her autobiography where she analyses her first experience of learning English, having moved from Poland to Canada about the age of 12:

> *The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. 'River' in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the sense of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. 'River' in English is cold – a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke* (Hoffman 1989, 106).

The third perspective on the language-culture nexus reflects the concerns of linguists and the focus on language which is traditional in language teaching:

- a linguistic system perspective, where we might analyse and describe the grammar of a language but there is no necessary relationship to a cultural context; such a relationship is only present and created in linguistic practice.

In this tradition, the nexus between a specific language being taught and learnt and a culture has been created by treating 'culture' as a body of knowledge about a country and its (national) culture, often in the form of trivial information rather than knowledge and understanding (Byram, 1989), but the relationship of this information to linguistic practice has remained unformulated and unclear.

The tradition has been much criticised by, *inter alia*, Holliday (1999) who contrasts the *'large culture paradigm'* and *'small culture paradigm'*. He defines the former as an *'essentialist'* i.e. reductive view of culture that describes culture as existing on ethnic, national and international levels, and the small culture paradigm as a non-essentialist view that focuses on the cohesiveness of social groups regardless of the group size. He goes on to argue that the *'essentialised'* and *'reified'* conceptualization of *'large culture',* has negative implications, that *'[it] supports political spheres' interests'* (p. 243), and the cosmopolitan orientation of the world. There is much to acknowledge in this view because there is no doubt that language teachers, and others, have used essentialised concepts of 'the' culture of 'the' language which they teach. The weakness in his argument is to assume that a *'large culture'* perspective cannot recognise that such cultures are not homogeneous and static over time, but dynamic, Barrett et al. emphasise that:

> *cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous groups that embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often contested, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways* (2013, 5).

This applies whether the cultural groups are small, such as a family, or large, such as a society. Often, changes are subtle and only noticeable in retrospect and over longer periods of time, but sometimes they are visible in the short term. For example, in the Algerian sociolinguistic context, there was a rapid and conscious shift, within half a century, from being an officially French-speaking country, to Arabic and then Arabic and Amazigh as two official languages.

In the light of this discussion of the complexity of the concept of culture, for the purposes of this article and as a proposal for language teaching in general, we use the following definition:

> *Culture* is a term that refers to the axiomatic principles, beliefs, values, behaviours, and communication patterns of a social group that are shaped and influenced by history, geography, politics, economy, religion and globalization, and continuously shaped and re-shaped through social interaction.

The culture of a social group – just like its language – can be analysed synchronically or diachronically, and in the former case becomes 'static', but the static is the basis of the dynamic. It is important to emphasise the dynamic nature of culture in language teaching, not in order to analyse the change over time, but to make learners aware that what might be true about one culture at a certain point in time might not be the same at another point in time, and thus to make them avoid generalizations and stereotypes.

Furthermore, the concept of culture proposed here means, first, that there are cultures of groups which are relatively stable over time but also of groups which are transitory and, second, that there are groups which are not just the traditional ones of language teaching – the ethnic, national groups – but also the social groups which exist across ethnic, national and international boundaries. In the project described below, no one particular culture is addressed as a 'target culture' of the 'target language', but different cultures from different countries and ethnic groups are put into a relationship with English, because learners of English are likely to use it as a lingua franca, where more than 'English culture' is present through the language-culture nexus.

Intercultural competence

This concept has been defined in different ways by different scholars. Hammer *et al.* (2003, 422) define intercultural competence as *'the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways'* whereas Deardorff (2004, 198) has a more precise and extended definition:

> *[…] the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.*

Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, 7) also refer to effectiveness and appropriateness but, omitting reference to skills, emphasise the nature of the interlocutors in the communication, albeit without a clear explanation of what they mean by *'management':*

> *[…] the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world.*

In their authoritative survey of models of intercultural competence, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, 17) refer to Byram's (1997) model as *'influential',* although they miss the important point that its influence has been in language teaching and that it was developed to help teachers plan a systematic approach to teaching and assessing intercultural competence. It is for this reason that the model is used here. The model has five elements: attitudes of curiosity and openness (savoir être); knowledge of social groups, their products, practices and social interaction processes (savoirs); skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre); skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire); and critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). These are also known as five 'savoirs' since the French term includes attitudes, skills and knowledge.

The model has its critics, some of whom (e.g. Matsuo 2012, Risager, 2007) say that it equates 'culture' with 'national culture' but this is a mis-interpretation, as Boye (2016, 37-38) notes. A more telling criticism is of its structuralist nature, which does not take into account post-structuralist analyses of linguistic interaction based notably on Bakhtin (Kramsch, 2009; Matsuo, 2014). Kramsch (2009) nonetheless remarks that a structuralist perspective facilitates assessment, a requirement which has become increasingly present in education systems. Thus, developing intercultural competence in this project means to encourage the process of reflections on 'self' and 'other', on perspective taking, on social and linguistic context in interactions, as we shall demonstrate below.

The Algerian context

The project took place in master's level English classes in two Algerian universities in the east of the country. In the Algerian

education system, students are taught Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) from the first year of schooling as the 'official' language. Nowadays, French is taught as a 'second' language from the third grade of the 5th grade primary school. The project participants, however, had started learning French from the fourth grade of a 6th grade primary school. English is taught as a 'foreign' language from the first grade of the 4th grade middle school. The students involved in this research studied English as a major in their undergraduate studies (Licence) and were doing their master's degree specializing in either 'Didactics of foreign languages' (Didactique des langues étrangères) in University 1 or 'Language and culture' (Langue et culture) in University 2. They had a module on 'teaching culture and foreign language' and 'language and culture' respectively, and the project took place in these modules.

A main theme in the project was the question of students' experience of contemporary social diversity. Algeria society is itself diverse. First, there are Kabyle people who call themselves Imazighen (singular Amazigh) also known as Tamazight and who represent the majority of Berbers. They are located mainly in the north east of the country (east of the capital, Algiers, and north of Constantine). They live in different Provinces such as Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaia and Bouira; a smaller proportion live in Algiers and a minority live in Boumerdes, Bordj Bouarririj, Setif and Jijel. Second, the Shawi are located in the Aures Mountain in North East Algeria (South of Constantine). The Aures includes Batna, Tebessa, Khenchela, Oum el Bouaghi, Souk Ahras and Biskra provinces. Third, the tribe of Mezab is situated in the Northern Sahara, in Ghardaia province. The fourth group is the Tuareg who live in Southern Sahara. However, none of these ethnic groups is restricted to staying in one region and nowadays many of them move to large cities for economic reasons.

Although the country as a whole is diverse, students attend the university nearest to where they live and will not usually have interaction with diverse people from within Algeria. The universities where this study took place remain anonymous but a reference to the socio-linguistic context is needed. University 1 is in the Aures region where the main ethnic group is Shawi. Many students speak

Shawi in addition to the Algerian Arabic dialect there; some students do not speak the Shawi language but still identify as Shawi because their parents do. A minority of the students identify as Arabic and do not have Shawi origins. University 2 is similar. It is in a city surrounded by small villages and towns many of which are in the Shawi region, and from which many of the students originate. There were, however, also student participants who are considered Arab, i.e., their native language is the Algerian Arabic dialect and they do not have Berber origins.

The internal diversity, thus, leads in fact to relatively little actual experience of diversity. Furthermore, there is little or no experience of external diversity, because not many tourists visit the country and students in Algeria, and young people in general, have little if any interaction with foreigners, especially if they live in small cities. Only a small minority able to afford to travel will meet people from other countries.

However, a new phenomenon has arisen. In recent years, refugees have started to come to Algeria from Syria, Mali, Niger, and other sub-Saharan countries. Some stay, others see it as a stepping stone to Europe. The Algerian government does not provide them with any support such as dormitories or camps, and they live in the streets. Algerian people are constantly interacting with them, and for most people this is the only kind of diversity they experience.

Finally, there is another kind of diversity within Algeria. There is a minority community of Sufi people in some regions in Algeria; most of them live in the southern part of the country. Sufi people are Muslim but have some differences from Sunni people who are the majority, and because of the geographical isolation of Sufis, most Algerians have little, if any, contact with them.

In summary, it is evident that the experience of diversity for Algerians, and for our participants in particular, has in the past been limited, but has recently become focused on the presence of migrants. This was a starting point for the choice of literary texts for the project.

Literature and Intercultural Competence

In the Algerian context, Bredella's (2008) argument that literature gives insights into experiences that readers are most unlikely to have in their real life, is particularly apposite. Delanoy (2015) takes the same perspective, drawing on Reader Response Criticism to argue that literature's aesthetic potential engages learners in experimentation with feelings and ideas that can be new to them, away from their *'immediate life concerns'*. This was confirmed in the project by one of the students who said, after reading a literary text that describes the experience of a refugee:

> *I have realised that I am so self-centred, I mean, I'm only concerned about my life, I never take a moment and try to consider those refugees and how they feel. It's easy to understand their experience but it's not easy to understand their feelings, maybe I have been a bit harsh on them. The text raised my awareness, I mean, I never thought of the deep meaning of their experience and feelings. I was just concerned about my everyday life.*

Volkman (2016, 116-117) describes literary texts as *'fictional laboratories'* which allow learners to experiment with the unfamiliar life perspectives of fictional characters and compare them to their own and argues for intercultural learning through literature since

> *[…] literary texts always present the other in fictionalized form and provoke culture-bound responses* (2015, 54).

In an earlier paper, drawing on Bredella (2010), Volkman takes the usual foreign language teaching perspective and argues that:

> *literary texts offer privileged insights into target cultures. They present an insider's perspective and thus provide a sort of surrogate experience of encounters with foreignness which is not easily accessible first hand* (Volkmann, 2015, 55)

In our project, however, literary texts were not used to provide insights into a *'foreignness'* of an inaccessible other country but into the lives of others within students' own country. English lends itself more than most languages to this perspective because, being the official or dominant language of more than one country, there is no one specific culture to be privileged, and being an international lingua franca, English also lends itself to presenting experiences with origins in other languages and cultures, creating a new culture-

language nexus. This was the rationale for using extracts from an English translation, *Monsieur Linh and his child*, of an originally French novel entitled *La petite fille de monsieur Linh,* and from an English translation of a Turkish novel, *The Forty Rules of Love.*

The first novel was selected because it describes a refugee's experience in a host country and provides students with an insight into the experience of a refugee. The second was selected because the main character is Sufi. Together, the two novels thus deal with the two kinds of diversity Algerian students may encounter in Algeria, irrespective of whether they ever leave the country or encounter foreign tourists.

Methodology

The project was based on the theory of action research (e.g. McNiff, 1998; Burns, 2010). The teacher as researcher concept was modified in that the researcher (Lamia) planned the course of study which was to be implemented by other teachers, although in practice she was in fact involved in the teaching and followed the teacher as researcher model closely. Data collected included interviews with teachers before the start of the intervention, to have an understanding of their perceptions of the intercultural dimension which had been newly introduced in the syllabus three years previously, and to talk about their teaching methods, their materials and their objectives. Further discussions with the teachers continued throughout the intervention, to obtain feedback and assess the students' attainment of the objectives. Students' worksheets and audio-recorded classroom discussions were also collected and Lamia kept a journal of reflections on her classroom observations. At the end of the intervention, interviews with the students were held to know more about their experience of learning with literature. In this article we draw only on students' products and transcripts of classroom talk. Ethical issues were dealt with through the University of Durham's ethical procedures.

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), alternative criteria to validity and reliability were used to establish the quality of the research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

These four criteria establish the 'trustworthiness' of research which uses qualitative data to interpret the socially constructed realities of participants, and it is important that the reader is able to audit the researcher's actions throughout the study. Here we shall present only some of the data to demonstrate the effectiveness of using literary texts, rather than attempting to evaluate the course as a whole (Nemouchi, forthcoming).

Teaching the course

Syllabus documents in higher education in Algeria are usually produced within each university, following guidelines set by the Ministry of Higher Education. The documents are then given to teachers as guidance but they are not restricted to the content in them. This allowed Lamia to design lessons where the purpose was, first, for learners to become aware of the rationale for the cultural dimension in teaching/learning English and, second, to further develop students' own intercultural competence. Thus, when planning the lessons the focus was on materials that allowed the students to experience intercultural communication and engage them in practice, and then in reflection on and evaluation of their own real-life experiences. Literary texts – complemented by visual materials – were the basis of this for the reasons given above.

The course started in the first week of November 2018 and lasted for 6 weeks in both University1 and University2, with 90 minutes per week and two groups from each university. In University1, Lamia took over from the usual teacher, but in University2 she co-taught with the class's usual teacher.

The purpose of the course using literary texts was, following Byram (1997), to develop intercultural skills and knowledge and to encourage intercultural attitudes through discussion, and more importantly, to encourage students to transfer the knowledge, skills and attitudes they develop in the classroom to real-life contexts. This was done by encouraging them to reflect on their experiences, share, analyse and discuss them in the classroom and consider whether, as a result of this learning, they would change their behaviour. This was carried out by raising students' awareness of

the conditions and experiences of refugees as well as providing them with an insight into Sufism and Sufi principles and values through the literary texts.

The story of Mr Linh and his granddaughter is of a refugee from Vietnam in France who does not speak the language of the host country, struggles to cope with the new environment but eventually succeeds in developing a friendship with someone, without them speaking a common language. The second text about a Sufi character depicts principles and values of Sufism through the interaction of a Sufi character with a non-believer who is angry with him because of his beliefs and blames people who have religious beliefs for all the misery that had happened to him and his family. The Sufi character, however, remains calm and tries to help him overcome his pain according to the teachings of Sufism, and eventually succeeds.

Each time the events in the texts were discussed, the students were encouraged by the teacher, or teachers in the case of University 2, to link the characters' experiences to their own and to their environment, to compare and contrast contexts and views, and sometimes to refer to their religious values, in order to self-assess their behaviours and reconsider their attitudes.

Contrary to usual practices, and perhaps to the surprise of the participants, Lamia's role as an EFL teacher in University1, or in a teaching team in University 2, was not to provide the students with cultural facts about (English-speaking) countries and cultures, but with theoretical knowledge. The teacher's role was to organise and guide classroom discussions, raise questions in the classroom, encourage and assist the students to come up with their own conclusions, in order to achieve the objectives of each lesson. Lessons were planned in terms of 'objectives' formulated as observable behaviour in the 'can-do' mode established for example in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) or the American *World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) and following Byram's (1997) model.

An overview of the aims and objectives linked to the savoirs is presented in Table 1:

Focus	Objectives: By the end of the lesson/course the students will be able to
Attitudes and feelings (savoir être: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own)	1. know how to analyse their own attitudes and feelings throughout the reading process, 2. explain or describe their feelings and attitudes about the text, the characters and the events. 3. compare and interpret their attitudes in collaboration with their peers.
Using imagination to analyse and interpret an intercultural communication (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 and 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	1. know the importance of non-verbal communication when communicating interculturally. 2. analyse and interpret an intercultural communication in a literary text by applying their knowledge of social interaction processes and imagination.
Interpreting intercultural encounters and engaging in a creative encounter (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)	1. Identify areas of misunderstanding in intercultural interactions in literary texts and be able to interpret them. 2. Engage the characters in an imaginary intercultural communication as the characters of the literary text without the use of verbal language.
Critical cultural awareness and issues of social justice	1. Be aware of the misconceptions, biases and

(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)	prejudices they build about people – based on their physical appearance – that they may not have been conscious of, and discuss the impact this has on social justice. 2. Be able to compare their own religious beliefs and practices to those of Sufi people in order to better understand both and critically evaluate their pre-conceptions about Sufism.

Table 1: Overview of planning for the course

Two representative lessons were as follows:

In the first lesson, the students were asked to write what they thought about refugees in Algeria and to tell about any experience they had had with them. Many students said that they do not want refugees from other African countries to stay in Algeria because of the dangerous diseases they may bring with them. Extracts from what they said include:

> *"I don't interact with refugees that I come across in the streets except for giving them money. Other than that I have nothing to do with them this is probably out of fear from catching the different diseases they bring along. However, I sometimes feel sorry for them because of the misery they survive."*

> *"I always avoid them because they suffer from contagious diseases so I don't have any experience dealing with them"*

Many students also expressed their wish to isolate refugees in special camps, away from Algerians, until the situations in their countries are better and they can go back, for example:

> *"for me the most appropriate way of dealing with them [Malian refugees] is avoiding them as much as I can. I am not being racist, I understand their suffering and that they are surviving tough circumstances, however, it is vital for the Algerian government to protect us from them by providing them with refugee camps isolated from Algerians until war is over in their countries so that they go back there."*

Some students, however, were more welcoming:

"Despite the fact that their residence in Algeria might have a negative impact on Algerians such as the harmful diseases they have; they are still welcome because it is important to provide innocent people with shelter."

"We Algerians as Muslims should interact with refugees kindly and politely as we do with all other people. We should not let them feel that they are refugees or foreigners. Personally, whenever I meet with a refugee I deal with them as brother and sisters. I always initiate conversations with them and offer help whenever I can."

Afterwards the students were assigned two extracts (T1 and T2) from *Monsieur Linh and his child* to read at home. T1 describes the experience of Monsieur Linh, a Vietnamese refugee fleeing his country to France to escape war, in which he had lost all his family except his granddaughter. The author describes Linh's feelings and memories as he is on his way to a refugee dormitory in France. T2 describes Linh's first time outside the dormitory, after weeks of fear of going outside into the unknown. He meets a man from the host country in a public park who starts talking about his dead wife and the precious memories he has of her in the place where they were sitting. Linh cannot understand what he is saying because he does not yet speak the language of the host country.

Students were also asked to collect pictures (drawings or photographs) that they thought could demonstrate their feelings about the text, the characters and the events during the reading. Following Matos's (2012) intercultural reading approach, the aim behind using pictures and drawings while reading was to give the students time to reflect: *'the reader should be given time, a silent place to reflect on his/her reading'* (p. 130). The intention was to encourage *'aesthetic reading'* in the learners as they read at home, and to elicit their creative thinking through asking them to find a picture. Aesthetic reading is contrasted with *'efferent reading'* i.e. reading for the meaning of the text or for additional information, i.e. the main idea or information that the reader takes away from any type of text. In aesthetic reading, according to Rosenblatt (1994, 25),

[…] the reader's attention is centred directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.

Scholars such as Bredella (1996), Gonçalves Matos (2012) and Delanoy (2015) argue that aesthetic reading experience gives the

learners access to a secondary world shaped by the piece of literature and their commitment to the reading triggers new ideas and feelings. Gonçalves Matos describes this as follows:

> *In the first phase, the learner formulates an emotional response and tentative insights. Students will mainly develop an appreciation of the text, explore their personal experience of the text, wonder and build hypotheses* (2012, 130).

The students were asked to capture their feelings and attitudes during the reading by visuals that they thought could represent their feelings and attitudes throughout the reading experience.

During the second lesson, the students were asked to show the pictures they had brought, discuss them in small groups and then report a summary of their discussions to the whole class. Using drawings, the students then expressed their feelings about Linh as a refugee and went on to relate the experience of the character to the refugees they are familiar with in their environment and whom they encounter on a daily basis.

In further lessons the students were asked to reproduce the T2, imagining themselves in Linh's situation and say how they would react knowing that he does not speak the same language as his interlocutor; hence, they were asked to analyse the body language of both characters. Next, the students were given extracts T3 then T4, where Linh is mistreated by people in the street, and were asked to reflect on their real-life experiences with refugees in their society and how they treat them. Finally, they were assigned the text on Sufism and were asked to compare their own religious principles and beliefs to the ones of the Sufi character in the text.

Evaluation of the lessons

Here we focus on the first two lessons and the data which revealed elements of the savoirs, but particularly savoir être, in order to discuss below the vexed question of 'empathy'.

The students were observed to reveal attitudes of curiosity about who the character is, as there was no mention of him as being a refugee at the beginning of T1, and curiosity about what is going to happen to him later in the novel. Extracts from what the students

from one group said while summarising their discussions of their pictures are the following:

> *"For example, in the first text we have shared the feeling of 'wondering', attempting to understand what the text is about, why the uncle was frightened to go outside, why there was the word 'ghost', is it a figure of speech or does he literally fear some ghost to go outside."*

Here we see evidence of what Gonçalves Matos, quoted above, calls wondering and building hypotheses. In other cases, students revealed more of the reading process as they analysed retrospectively their reactions:

> *"I took an emotional trip as the text went on, for the first text I felt pity and curiosity about what will happen in their lives."*

> *"I was curious to know who the characters are and where this is happening, then when they started speaking about the refugee camp I felt so sad."*

Some students also showed 'ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (savoir s'engager). Instances of this can be seen in Lesson 2 when they discussed in small groups the pictures they had collected to represent their attitudes:

> *"While reading the text I was thinking about refugees here and I think that the text has a hidden purpose which says don't just look at refugees as people who seek charity and help, they need something else to overcome the misery they are facing. They need support not just with money but also with words, they need someone to push them to carry on with their lives."*

This shows the student linking and comparing the experience of the character as refugee to the refugees he/she is familiar with in their own society (savoir comprendre) and that he/she is questioning their own, and other people's, perceptions of refugees in their society (savoir s'engager). In another instance, the group discussion reveals the variation in response:

> *Student 1: "Thanks to this [the text], we have thought about the situation of the refugees who came to Algeria and who were totally neglected by us. Because of that, we were thinking about…or we felt regret for not trying to help them and we thought about the aesthetics of our country and forgot that they didn't have any other escape."*

> *Student 2: "I don't share their thought and I don't think we neglect them we just avoid them"*
>
> *The teacher commented: "you avoid them means you neglect them"*
>
> *Student 3: "No, those who come from Syria, for instance, we sympathise with them more than the others"*
>
> *The teacher asked: "why?"*
>
> *Student 4: "maybe because of our perception about black refugees compared to Syrian refugees."*
>
> *Student 3: "because of their behaviour, they haven't been well behaved since they came to Algeria"*
>
> *Student 5: "We have had classmates who come from Mali before, and they were very well behaved. I think the refugees who come from there and that my classmates think they are aggressive, it's because of the harsh conditions they have been through which made them who they are now."*
>
> *Student 3: "maybe we avoid them because of the cultural difference between us and them […]"*

Here we can see, first, that some students were not aware of refugees' experience or of the real reason they are in their society. After reading the text, they started questioning their own perceptions as reported by student 1. Other students (2, 3 and 4) make a distinction between refugees from different nationalities (Syrian versus other (African) countries) and are aware that their 'perceptions' are the barrier, but they do not show any signs of willingness to question their thoughts and perceptions. Student5, on the other hand, shows willingness to analyse and interpret behaviours of refugees from a different perspective than the one of her classmates, or maybe other people in her society, who said that they avoid them because of their behaviour. What has happened here is what Gonçalves Matos (2012, 132) describes as:

> *Forcing the student-reader to abandon a position of judging and to adopt instead the position of the interpreter, paying attention to details, to ambiguity and double meanings, to what remains unseen at first sight.*

Student 5 tries to explain that her classmates' behaviour is due to their experience of refugees but she thinks of earlier times when they had classmates from the same country (Mali) and explains the 'aggression' of recent Malian classmates as being a consequence of

the harsh conditions they have been through. She analyses in more depth because she takes a longer time perspective, and this reveals an attitude that facilitates the development of the skills of interpreting and as Byram (1997, p. 34) states *'the relationship of the attitudes factor with others is that of interdependence'*.

The analysis of the task of using drawings to represent the situation of refugees and their feelings towards them helped the students to attain the objectives of:

1. know how to analyse their own attitudes and feelings throughout the reading process,

2. explain or describe their feelings and attitudes about the text, the characters and the events.

Instances from their drawings and their oral explanations in the classroom are as follows:

> *"I explained the story by drawing a triangle, in the top of the triangle I explained the feeling of the man being a refugee, in the other corner … as being a survivor and he is being fed by his past memories. I draw a broken mirror as his past memory and he is trying to catch it, to stick to his own memories… past memories. However, he didn't realize that the mirror is broken and that it cannot save him from his feelings. Outside the triangle, there is an unknown life, unknown people and unknown future for him. In the second picture, I draw a black pool that represents his past, he's stuck in his past, but he wants to get out, he wants a new life. The door represents the new life. He is carrying the memory bag. Coming out of the black pool, he is dropping some of his memories about his family and friends and the closer he is to adapt to the new life we can see that his footsteps start to disappear".*
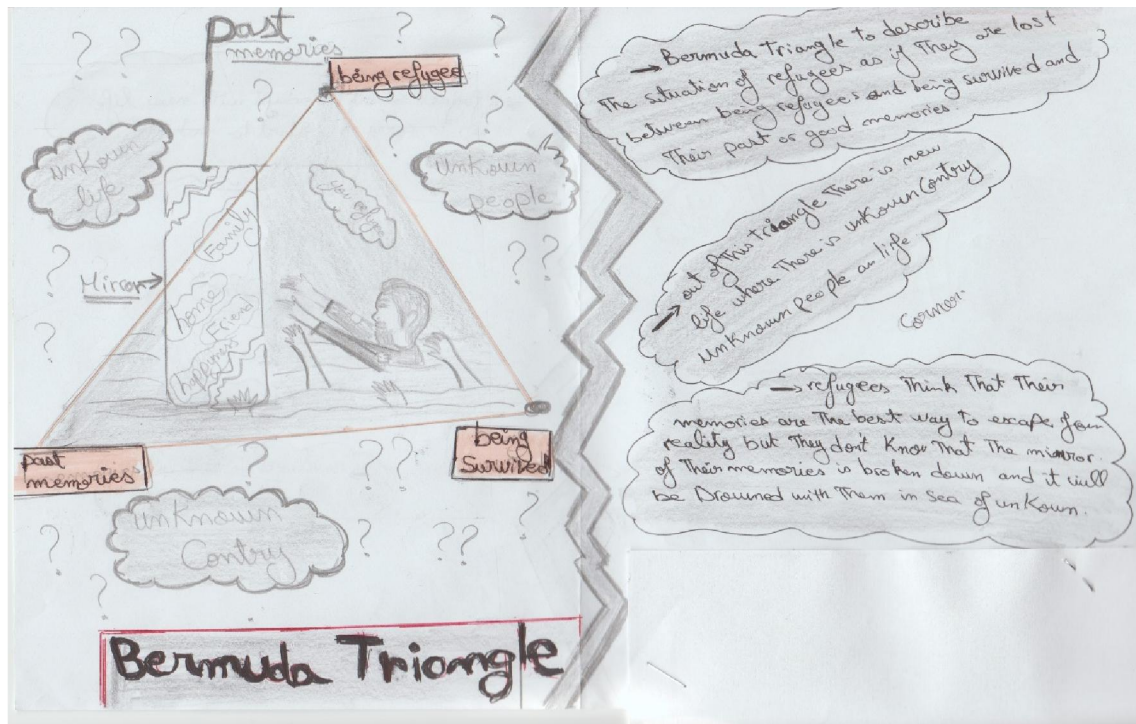
A second student writes:

> *I draw a picture that represents what remains from the Syrian refugees; we see that what remains is the Jasmin flowers. Syria is very famous with that kind of flowers, despite the fact that they are beautiful but people are still refusing them. We see them standing on the pedestrian passage surrounded by unknown people but once the traffic green light is on, these unknown people will step on those beautiful flowers and pass by.*

This second example shows that the student is linking the experience of the character who is a refugee in the literary text to the ones in her society because in Algeria traffic lights are where we usually meet refugees as they ask car drivers for help.

Discussion

Three major issues arise from the analysis: that literary texts are a powerful means of developing intercultural competence; that intercultural competence does not have to be directed towards people of another country; that Byram's (1997) model can be further refined to take into account empirical data.

The potential of literary texts in developing intercultural competence has been demonstrated over the last two decades, as we saw in the analysis of the literature above. We have further supported that view here by demonstrating that the literature used need not be about other countries and peoples but can help learners to reflect on their own country and the varied social groups within it, both established 'indigenous' groups such as the Sufis, and recently arrived 'immigrant groups' such as refugees[2]. It is also important to notice that literature in translation is also a viable approach; the literature does not have to be associated with the target language and with countries where it is spoken. The literature is thus an embodiment of English as a lingua franca (ELF); the students read literature in translation but translated into English rather than their L1.

An associated point is that, in this case, the students live in a country where there is minimal personal contact with, or immediate experience of, people from other countries. Most students, and others in Algerian society, only have contact and experience which is mediated by the mass media and in some cases by social media. The notable exception is the refugee group. In many other countries, including those in the Maghreb, there is a strong tourist trade and interaction mainly on a commercial basis. The 'foreigners' with

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[2] In the final account of this project (Nemouchi, forthcoming) there will be explanations of changes Lamia made in the details of the pedagogy recommended in the literature by, for example, Gonçalves Matos (2012), but that is not our focus here.

whom this group of students has immediate experience - in the streets as fleeting contacts or as classmates in their university - are quite different from the tourists in for example Tunisia or Morocco, and they are not visitors who will quickly 'return home', leaving only the commercial impact of tourism. Then there is the second kind of 'other', the Sufis whom we have not had space to discuss here, but who are, despite being indigenous members of Algeria society, nonetheless just as 'not us'. The use of the term 'foreign' is scarcely appropriate to either refugees or Sufis, even though they are being discussed in a 'foreign language class'. For although in practice we have shown that English is, at least during the project and probably more generally, being taught and learnt as a lingua franca, the designation from school and into university is that it is a 'foreign' language ("langue étrangère").

The third point for discussion has a theoretical import. Popper (1959) argues that scientific theories cannot be proved true but can only be falsified, and then further refined and tested. This principle can be applied to models of intercultural competence in the sense that if a model which purports to include all the dimensions of intercultural competence cannot account for all the empirical evidence, it needs to be improved and further tested empirically. Byram's (1997) model does not claim to represent all dimensions of intercultural competence but only those which are teachable and assessable in the language classroom. Nonetheless the application of the Popperian principle can be applied in a different way. For if it is demonstrated that, as a consequence of teaching, learning takes place which enhances intercultural competence but is not included in the model, then it can be argued that the model needs expanding to include new 'savoirs'. This has been done already by Houghton (2010) who suggests *'savoir se transformer'* (knowing how to become).

In the empirical data presented here, we can see that, in addition to data which can be classified under the existing savoirs, there are data which can be better described as 'empathy'. Byram does refer to empathy:

> *A second perspective introduced in Chapter 1, represented by Gudykunst (1994), emphasised especially the abilities to gather knowledge about another*

> *culture and the skills of empathy, management of anxiety and adaptability. In my model these characteristics are included in attitudes and skills of discovery, interpretation and relating* (Byram 1997, 47).

Nonetheless, empathy is not addressed directly in the further descriptions of the savoirs. On the other hand, in the Council of Europe's (2018) *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) empathy is given an explicit role in *'competences for democratic culture'* which are *'teachable, learnable and assessable'*. It is considered a skill – or *'set of skills'*, both phrases are used – albeit a skill which is the foundation for a further effort of *'imagining'*:

> [Empathy is] *the ability to step outside one's own psychological frame of reference (to decentre from one's own perspective) and the ability to imaginatively apprehend and understand the psychological frame of reference and perspective of another person. This skill is fundamental to imagining the cultural affiliations, world views, beliefs, interests, emotions, wishes and needs of other people* (Council of Europe, 2018, 48).

Three forms of empathy are described: cognitive perspective-taking, affective perspective-taking and sympathy *('sometimes called "compassionate empathy" or "empathic concern"')* (p. 48). It is further argued that these three are the *'set of skills that are required to understand and relate to other people's thoughts, beliefs and feelings, this being a crucial set of skills for participating in a culture of democracy'* (p. 49). Sympathy is *'the ability to experience feelings of compassion and concern for other people based on the apprehension of their cognitive or affective state or condition, or their material situation or circumstances',* which describes accurately what can be seen in the data above, particularly in students' drawings and their explanations of them.

Consider the first drawing and explanation. The student begins with affective perspective-taking - *'the ability to apprehend and understand the emotions, feelings and needs of other people'* - where the crucial phrase is *'I explained'* two perspectives, of the refugee and the survivor:

> *"I explained the story by drawing a triangle, in the top of the triangle I explained the feeling of the man being a refugee, in the other corner … as being a survivor and he is being fed by his past memories."*

There is no expression of *'compassion and concern',* but there is a further level of observation, of *'knowing more and better'* in the statement:

"he didn't realize that the mirror is broken and that it cannot save him from his feelings".

The RFCDC refers to a set of skills of perspective-taking which, it seems, lead automatically to experiencing compassion and concern for others. If the movement is automatic, then it is necessary to teach only the skills of perspective-taking or decentring, with the expectation that compassion and concern will follow. It can be therefore expected by a student's teacher that, even though compassion and concern are not explicit, they are present. Can the teacher assess whether this is the case?

In Volume 2 of the RFCDC, there are two sets of descriptors: *'key descriptors'* and a *'full bank of descriptors'*. The key descriptors for empathy, and the level of attainment they describe, are:

1. Can recognise when a companion needs his/her help - Basic

2. Expresses sympathy for the bad things that he/she has seen happen to other people - Basic

3. Tries to understand his/her friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective - Intermediate

4. Takes other people's feelings into account when making decisions - Intermediate

5. Expresses the view that, when he/she thinks about people in other countries, he/she shares their joys and sorrows - Advanced

6. Accurately identifies the feelings of others, even when they do not want to show them - Advanced (our numbering)

Of these there is evidence in the data from the first student of Number 3 (even it is not a matter of 'friends' but of refugees) and the 'knowing more and better' might be classified as Number 6 but is probably better described in other terms. This is of course not the whole of this student's output and other elements may be found in other data which we cannot consider here for lack of space.

What is more important for our purposes here is that the teacher's objective of stimulating 'aesthetic reading' and an expression

of feelings through drawings, (suggested by Delanoy, personal communication, 2018) has elicited an observable and assessable element of empathy. In future planning she could then include the skills of empathy as an explicit objective with the assurance that the particular teaching technique of asking students to draw will be effective.

Returning to Byram's (1997) model and the application of a Popper-like principle of falsifiability, it seems that a modification is necessary, with an explicit inclusion of empathy, a new savoir. This is an issue which one of the authors of this article will need to consider, if the model is to serve its purpose of facilitating systematic teaching and assessing of intercultural competence. One caveat is however necessary. The RFCDC is a model to be used across the whole curriculum not only in language teaching, and it is not expected that all the 20 competences of the RFCDC should be taught in just one subject. It might be argued that empathy is a skill which should be the focus in another subject area, such as history teaching, where empathy is often considered to be an important though contested teaching objective (e.g. Davison, 2017).

Conclusion

Literary texts are a powerful tool to encourage students to reflect on and to develop intercultural competence. They should, however, be used carefully so that learners can make sense of them and relate their own experience to them. In addition, teachers should focus on the reading experience and the aesthetic reading response of the students rather than the general theme of the text. It is the aesthetic and empathetic response to the experience of Mr Linh which is important, rather than information about how refugees came from Vietnam to France.

Empathy is an important factor. It needs to be defined carefully if it is to become part of the objectives of lesson planning and assessment of learners' attainment of the objectives. Treating empathy as a skill or set of skills makes this possible and we have argued that teaching the cognitive skills of decentring will lead to the acquisition of affective perspectives and compassion. Perhaps here,

language teachers should discuss the issues - in the cross-curricular spirit of the RFCDC - with other teachers, particularly teacher of history.

Finally, models of intercultural competence are, we know, legion, and the selection of Byram (1997) here has been shown to be of use in pedagogy. Nonetheless, all models and theories should be challenged and modified as new data become available, a task which is yet to be completed.

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