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Keeping sight of the big picture: a critical response to Ofsted's 2021 Curriculum Research Review for languages

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical perspective on Ofsted's (2021) *Curriculum Research Review for Languages* (OCRR). Whilst the OCRR contains much that we would agree with (including its underpinning principle of drawing on research evidence to inform policy and pedagogy), we are nevertheless concerned that it could result in unintended negative effects on both teachers and learners of modern languages. We believe that any problematic elements of the OCRR will be amplified by the powerful status of the organisation whose name it bears. Overall, we think there is a danger that the OCRR could lead teachers to focus too heavily on individual building blocks in the early stages of language learning, and thus lose sight of the 'bigger picture'. We also disagree with some of the OCRR's specific recommendations, which, we argue, do not seem to be based on sufficiently rigorous or extensive evidence. We suggest that other 'pillars' may also be important in supporting the edifice of language proficiency, including strategic competence and intercultural understanding. Further, we argue that the OCRR fails to reflect recent technological advances which have transformed the language learning environment. Finally, we argue for the crucial importance of teachers' professional judgment in determining the most appropriate instructional approaches for a given classroom on a given occasion. Addressing these concerns, our article discusses the following topics: (1) the importance of communication in modern language learning; (2) the development of communication strategies; (3) the potential impact on target language teaching; (4) the position of culture in language learning; (5) the role of challenging texts, spoken and written; (6) the role of technology; (7) the nature of teacher professionalism; and (8) the evidence base on which the OCRR explicitly draws in making its recommendations.

KEYWORDS

Second language learning;
second language pedagogy;
curriculum ownership

Introduction

How can we make modern languages lessons in English secondary school classrooms as effective as possible? This is a question with which we have grappled as teachers, teacher educators and researchers for many years, against a backdrop of persistently low motivation, uptake and achievement by students (British Academy 2019). It seems very likely that there are no easy answers or simple solutions. If there were, everybody would have known about them by now.

Given the challenges faced by modern languages, we welcome the renewed focus on improving language teaching at the policy level over recent years, of which Ofsted's 2021 Curriculum Research

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Review for languages (Ofsted 2021; henceforth, OCRR) forms a part. We also welcome the OCRR's underpinning principle of drawing on research evidence to inform policy and pedagogy. The review contains much that we agree with. For example, we agree that developing knowledge of vocabulary – and particularly high-frequency words, which can be applied across topics – is crucially important. We agree with the importance of ensuring that language forms are developed over time and as appropriate to individuals and to groups. We are also pleased to see phonics getting the attention which we think it deserves, after (we would argue) many years of neglect in many classrooms. We also agree with the need for senior leaders to promote and support language learning in schools, if the subject is to thrive.

However, we are also worried that the OCRR may have some unintended consequences, resulting in negative effects on both teachers and learners of modern languages. Overall, we think there is a danger that it could lead teachers to focus too heavily on individual building blocks in the early stages, and thus lose sight of the 'bigger picture'. Rather like a pointilliste painting, if learners devote all their attention to the individual dots of paint, they may forget to step back and appreciate the picture as a whole. We also disagree with some of the OCRR's specific recommendations, which do not always seem (to us) to be based on sufficiently rigorous or extensive evidence; and we would suggest that other 'pillars' may also be important in supporting the edifice of language proficiency beyond those identified in the review. Finally, we would argue that language learning is qualitatively different today than it was twenty years ago due to the vastly increased, and continually increasing, affordances of technology, an area which seems neglected by the review.

We believe that any problematic elements of the OCRR will inevitably be amplified by the powerful status of the organisation whose name it bears. There have been numerous other attempts to synthesise research evidence and formulate 'best practice' guidance for languages teachers (for example, Driscoll et al. 2004; R. Ellis 2005; Fitzpatrick et al. 2018; Harris and Ó Duibhir 2011; Lightbown 2003; Macaro et al. 2015; Murphy et al. 2020; Nation and Macalister 2010; Smith and Conti 2016). However, these documents have a different status to the one published by Ofsted, which conducts high-stakes inspections of schools. Indeed, we have already heard anecdotal evidence of the OCRR influencing the inspection process.

Given the OCRR's status, we think that it is particularly important for teachers to know the extent to which they can have confidence in its recommendations. Our aim in this article, therefore, is to offer a critical perspective on the OCRR, exploring, in particular, some areas which we think merit further reflection: (1) the importance of communication in modern language learning; (2) the development of communication strategies; (3) the potential impact on target language teaching; (4) the position of culture in language learning; (5) the role of challenging texts, spoken and written; (6) the role of technology; and (7) the nature of teacher professionalism. Finally, (8) we will comment on the evidence base on which the OCRR explicitly draws in making its recommendations.

Communicativeness

The essential function of language is to communicate. We are concerned that, if teachers are directed – by a document as powerful as this one – to focus first and foremost on individual building blocks of linguistic knowledge, then there is a risk that they may lose sight of the bigger picture of language as a communicative tool. The OCRR is framed in terms of skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser 2007), but there is also plentiful research evidence emphasising that trying out language through interaction, using whatever resources the learner has to hand, can promote second language (L2) development (e.g. Loewen and Sato 2018). Attempts at communication allow learners to test out hypotheses about how the language works, identify gaps in their current language knowledge and receive corrective feedback from more expert speakers (e.g. Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam 2006; Swain 1985). We would be concerned if such communicative interaction were reduced – or even lost altogether – in modern languages classrooms in pursuit of compliance with the OCRR recommendations.

We would also observe that the internet has opened up unprecedented opportunities for genuine communicative interaction with other speakers of the target language all over the world. Indeed, two years of pandemic-enforced video calls have normalised this mode of interaction for many of us. In our view, it would be a shame if such opportunities were not exploited fully because of a concern that students must put the ‘building blocks’ of language in place first. Further, we would argue that, in the current post-Brexit climate, getting students communicating with their peers in Europe is an urgent priority; we think that modern languages teachers could play a key role in rebuilding, from the bottom up, an enthusiasm for connecting with our European friends. Getting students in different countries to interact positively and smile at one other on a video call can be done from the very start of language learning, without needing to wait for any building blocks to be in place!

We acknowledge that, in a world of increasingly fast and accurate machine translation – in both spoken and written modalities – a simplistic justification for language learning based on basic, transactional communication is no longer sufficient. For example, I do not need to know the words for all the dishes that I might find on a Spanish menu if I can scan it with my phone and instantly see it in my own language. However, there are clearly limitations to computer-mediated communication, certainly in terms of human connection. We would like students to experience the thrill – or at least, the satisfaction – of exchanging thoughts, ideas and feelings with someone in another language.

Communication strategies

Attempting to communicate with limited resources also has other potential benefits. Above and beyond the development of linguistic knowledge, it provides learners with opportunities to develop coping strategies and to build resilience and confidence as communicators. We see a fundamental value in helping learners to develop such skills. Indeed, in our view, this could be seen as an additional pillar of language learning: part of being an effective communicator is having strategies to repair breakdowns in communication and to compensate for gaps in language knowledge, in both the productive and receptive modes. These strategies are also transferrable to any additional L2s which students may wish or need to learn in the future. We worry that it would be possible to interpret the OCRR’s ‘building blocks’ model in such a way as to actively shut down opportunities for learners to develop such communicative skills.

We see an additional risk that the quest to develop explicit (and measurable) ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ of the building blocks of language may encourage too much teaching through the medium of the first language. Indeed, the OCRR explicitly warns that ‘[t]he use of the target language by the teacher should not hinder pupils from being able to develop an understanding of the structure of the language’ (p.15). Whilst this may derive from a valid concern – namely, that trying to explain a grammar rule in the target language may be inefficient and even counter-productive – we must also bear in mind that the ultimate aim of language teaching (in our view) is not to develop ‘an understanding of the structure of the language’, but rather, to develop the ability to use it in communication. We are concerned that there could be a risk of lessons becoming dominated by teaching ‘about’ the language, through the medium of English, with limited opportunities to use it communicatively.

Our view is that teachers’ use of the target language can provide valuable exposure to the language and the opportunity to interact with it in a genuinely communicative way. Any target language use by the teacher can be conceptualised not simply as ‘instructions’ for a future task or as a tool for explaining a particular point, but rather, as a communicative listening comprehension task in its own right. (Where we agree with the OCRR, however, is in its emphasis on the need to plan target language use carefully, to avoid overwhelming students.)

Culture

The OCRR is framed by references to the cultural value of language learning. The opening paragraph quotes the Languages Programme of Study from the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum document

(DfE 2013), that learning a language 'is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures'. The final paragraph reiterates this point, arguing that '[t]he study of languages opens pupils' minds', 'develops a deep cultural awareness' and helps pupils to 'broaden their horizons' and 'explore cultures' (OCRR: 27). We wholeheartedly endorse this view of the transformative power of understanding other cultures through language learning.¹ We referred above to recent advances in machine translation and their impact on the rationale for learning languages. What machines still cannot do, however, is provide a deep understanding of other cultures and the ability to see the world through the lens of a different language.

It appears that many modern languages teachers also share this view of the importance of developing intercultural understanding. In a recent survey completed by over 600 languages teachers across England (Woore et al. 2020), we asked respondents what, in an ideal world, they would most like their students to gain from language learning by the end of Key Stage 4 (at age 16). A dominant theme in all sections of the questionnaire was 'the importance attached by our respondents to developing students' knowledge of other cultures and a positive, tolerant attitude towards these' (p.4). The inclusion of 'intercultural competence' as a key aim within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages (CoE 2011) and of 'global competence' within the latest PISA studies (OECD 2020) are further indications of the wider value and importance attached to this aspect of learning.

Where we seem to differ from the OCRR, however, is in our view of the role that culture can play at different stages of the language learning process. The OCRR appears to conceptualise progression in language learning as a journey, leading to culture as its destination: '[t]his journey leads to pupils becoming confident language learners with the ability to immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of the countries in scope' (p.6). Our view is that learners can and should encounter the cultural riches of another language from the very beginning of the learning process, and that this may serve as a powerful motivator within an expectancy-value model of motivation (Eccles 2009). As noted above, our worry is that by focussing too much on the mechanics of language (putting the building blocks in place), students may not spend long enough looking up and seeing the wider picture: that rich vista that language learning opens up, and which can give the subject so much of its meaning and purpose. Getting too hung up on whether the building blocks are in the right place may lead students to give up in frustration before they ever reach the 'destination' of cultural encounters.

It may be helpful not to see this question in terms of a polarised debate (building blocks *or* culture), but rather, to seek some middle ground in which both building blocks *and* culture play important roles in language learning. For example, the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) has shown that it is possible to integrate cultural elements into a scheme of work which is carefully sequenced in terms of grammatical structures and high-frequency vocabulary (as documented in their 'Cultural collection' spreadsheet²). Thus, for example, the NCELP scheme of work for Year 7 French (at age 11) introduces an authentic poem (*Sept Couleurs Magiques* by Mymi Doinet) just after October half term, in the eighth week of language learning at secondary school.³ For our part, we would like to see a rich, deep integration of culture from the very beginning of language learning and throughout all stages of the journey. How this might be achieved in practice is the subject of our next section.

Challenging texts

Reading and listening to texts (including with video) can be a key resource for exploring the target language culture. However, the kinds of texts which might be effective for this kind of exploration may well lie beyond students' linguistic 'comfort zone'. The OCRR seems to rule out many such texts, because 'teachers need to ensure that pupils are not exposed to large amounts of unfamiliar language too early'; this could 'demotivate them and may not maximise opportunities for learning' (20).

We think that this recommendation would be better worded more cautiously. As we have argued previously (e.g. Woore 2014), if we restrict learners to (almost) entirely familiar language, then it may take a very long time before they know enough vocabulary and structures to read, watch or listen to things that are genuinely engaging and at an appropriate level of cognitive challenge. In other words, there is again a risk that the journey takes so long that students lose interest in the destination. Further, as argued above, tackling linguistically challenging texts provides learners with opportunities – under their teacher's expert guidance – to develop skills, strategies and resilience that they can subsequently re-use elsewhere.

Our experience, as teachers and researchers, is that challenging texts can be used even with beginner learners. For example, in our 'FLEUR' study (Foreign Language Education: Unlocking Reading: Woore et al. 2018), we gave Year 7 students challenging texts to read on cultural topics which we hoped would be genuinely interesting to them, such as music stars, footballers and tourist destinations. These texts, designed to support the programmes of phonics and reading strategy instruction that the study evaluated, were popular with both students and teachers. In the words of one teacher, 'it has shown me to not shy away from challenging texts with unknown language and to use this early on in Year 7. They can do it and can learn something' (Woore et al. 2018: 37). Similarly, our recent 'OLLA' project (Online Language Learning for All)³ showed that beginner learners of French in Key Stage 3 can enjoy engaging with authentic cultural resources, such as Youtube videos, which are beyond their current linguistic level.

Indeed, through the internet, language learners now have access to an unprecedented wealth of cultural resources. The OCRR is silent on this issue. In our view, we should not discourage learners from accessing L2 materials that interest them, just because they are linguistically challenging; to do so could be to shut out valuable learning opportunities and sources of motivation. We might also draw a comparison to CLIL instruction in Europe (Bower 2019), where learners engage with cognitively challenging materials in the L2 and acquire language along the way.

In justifying their warning against using more challenging texts, the OCRR appeals to the widely cited threshold of 95% lexical coverage (the proportion of words in a text known by the learner) in order for 'adequate' comprehension to be achieved. However, it is unclear what is actually meant by 'adequate' comprehension; this is operationalised differently in different studies (see Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski 2010). Further, the 95% threshold assumes independent, individual reading or listening, yet both these activities – and reading in particular – need not be seen in this way. Reading and listening (or watching a video) can also be shared, social activities, in which groups of students work together to construct meaning from a text; and the languages teacher is the expert guide in this process, providing support and scaffolding towards comprehension. The same point could be made about the teaching of literacy in L1: should we withhold the study of Shakespeare's plays until learners know all the words and structures they contain? Or should we support students to enjoy these plays in all their glorious richness, even though there will be many individual words, structures and even whole passages which are difficult or indeed impossible for them to understand independently?

To sum up this section, we can borrow the words of the UK Literacy Association (Dombey et al. 2010: 13): 'If we want England's children to get better at reading and to do more of it, we have to give them a diet that is attractive, nutritious and satisfying' – even if the literary dishes on the menu go beyond the linguistic boundaries within which learners feel comfortable. As we have argued previously, a similar case could be made in respect of L2 reading (e.g. Woore et al. 2018), and by extension, L2 learning as a whole.

Technology

Language learning is not what it was twenty years ago – or at least, need not be so. We have already noted several areas in which the OCRR does not seem to reflect recent technological advances which have – potentially at least – transformed the language learning environment. Indeed, the words 'technology' and 'internet' do not appear at all in the main body of their document.

A high-profile review such as the OCRR might have been an opportunity for a more radical rethink of L2 teaching in schools. Can technology help us to move beyond the confines of the very limited classroom time available? (Students in England often have just two hours per week of modern languages lessons at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), or even less than this: Tinsley 2019). On the one hand, as NCELP has helpfully pointed out, language learning apps can play an important role in enhancing classroom-based learning (Shanks and Hobson 2019), at least for those with access to them. For example, following a 'flipped learning' model (Bishop and Verleger 2013), students could be asked to pre-learn lists of vocabulary at home using an app, and then come to the lesson ready to use those words in 'higher value', communicative tasks. On the other hand, the internet has opened up practically limitless opportunities for online informal L2 learning (see Sockett 2014) through activities such as interactive gaming and watching Youtube videos. Whilst such opportunities appear, to date, to have been chiefly exploited by students in other countries learning English, we see no reason why they should not also be taken up by modern languages students in the UK.

Might it, then, be possible for teachers to aim for a more holistic view of language teaching, in which the walls between intra- and extra-mural learning are broken down? This would entail a reconceptualisation of the teacher's role to become a facilitator or coordinator of learning, directing students to possible resources and helping them to develop strategies to learn effectively from them.

Teacher professionalism

It is our long-standing view – and central to the 'practical theorising' model which underpins our own department's Teacher Education courses (see Burn, Mutton, and Thompson 2022) – that teachers should be accorded the freedom to use their professional judgment to make appropriate decisions about language teaching in their own contexts. The OCRR does acknowledge the importance of 'curriculum leaders' in making decisions about what is taught and how. It also states that 'it is important to recognise that there is no single way of achieving high quality languages education' (p.1).

In practice, however, we fear that the review's recommendations are likely to erect many barriers which constrain teachers' professional judgment and make them less able to respond effectively to their own particular contexts. We see a risk of the OCRR feeding into what has been called an 'executive technician' view of teaching (see Winch, Oancea and Orchard 2015), a top-down model whereby researchers generate findings, curriculum designers interpret these findings and teachers then apply the resulting protocols to their own classrooms. We see constraints on teachers' professional autonomy as problematic for several reasons.

First, all classes, and all learners within them, are different. It is the individual teacher who best understands the myriad contextual factors that determine the most appropriate instructional approach at any given time. It is, in our view, essential that such decisions take into account relevant evidence from research and theory; however, this must not override contextual considerations. The different factors affecting a teacher's decision-making must be held in a delicate balance. The teacher can, in turn, appraise what they have done through assessment of the students' outcomes.

Second, we believe that a sense of professional autonomy, as encompassed in the practical theorising model, is important for many teachers' motivation (Woore, Mutton, and Molway 2020; Worth and Van den Brande 2020). We are concerned that, if teachers are asked to implement protocols and teach in particular, pre-specified ways, they may feel that their professional autonomy is being pared away, and this may lead to dissatisfaction with their work and ultimately contribute to teacher attrition. The retention of teachers in the profession was already a significant challenge in the UK, even before the potential exacerbation of the situation for modern languages in particular due to Brexit – because European citizens 'may find that their future in teaching in England is insecure' (OCRR:27).

Finally, where recommendations are made to guide teachers in shaping the contents of a languages curriculum and how the subject should be taught, it is clearly essential that these are

based on a rigorous, critical synthesis of the best available evidence. It is also essential that any recommendations are phrased in a suitably tentative way, acknowledging the complexities and limitations of the evidence that underpins them. This brings us to the final section of our article.

Evidence

Lastly, we wish to reflect on the evidence base which underpins the OCRR. It is claimed that the review ‘explores the literature relating to the field of foreign languages education’ in order to ‘identify factors that contribute to high-quality school languages curriculums, assessment, pedagogy and systems’ (OCRR: 2). However, it is not always clear to us on what basis the evidence that is included in the report has been selected, or in some cases, how strong that evidence base is. This may be partly due to a lack of transparency in referencing, rather than a problem with the evidence per se.

The first problem is that some of the claims made lack any references to support them, whilst others are supported by just one or two references, often individual empirical studies. As an example, take the claim that ‘explicit grammar instruction can have a positive impact on how efficiently pupils learn grammatical concepts’ (OCRR: 14 and footnotes 83 and 84). This is supported by five primary studies (of which the second and fifth are by the same three authors, whilst the second is ‘a partial replication and a response to’ the fourth). There is a vast array of second language acquisition (SLA) scholarship tackling the question of explicit instruction; it is not made clear how or why the five individual studies that are cited here have been selected. We believe that greater transparency would have been helpful in strengthening the credibility of the OCRR.

Second, there are references which appear to have been misread or mis-cited: for example, Macaro and Masterman (2006) is one of the five studies cited in support of the claim (quoted above) about explicit grammar instruction. In fact, however, the central point of Macaro and Masterman’s (2006) article is almost the opposite: namely, whilst an intensive course in French grammar helped pre-university students do better on some aspects of grammar tests, the participants showed no improvement in the accuracy with which they used the language in either translation or free composition tasks. We would suggest that when writing a document as powerful as this, it might have been valuable for Ofsted to send a draft to authors who are cited (or at least to those who are cited multiple times), in order to check that their work has been correctly represented.

Third, systematic reviews are conspicuous by their absence in the OCRR. A systematic review is ‘a review of existing research using explicit, accountable rigorous research methods’ (Gough, Oliver, and Thomas 2017: 2), aiming to answer specific review questions in a manner that is exhaustive and transparent. Systematic reviews have increasingly strengthened the evidence bases in the fields of SLA research and education more generally. Remaining with our example of explicit grammar instruction, there are existing systematic reviews that address this issue (e.g. Kang, Sok, and Han 2019; Norris and Ortega 2000; Spada and Tomita 2010). We were therefore surprised to find no references to these, or other, systematic reviews anywhere in the OCRR. The only ‘review’ of evidence explicitly labelled as such which we could find in the references list is Bauckham (2016), but this is itself not a systematic review in the sense being used here.

We recently conducted a form of systematic review ourselves (a Rapid Evidence Assessment) for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF; Murphy et al. 2020). This addressed two overarching questions, the first of which essentially covers the same territory as the OCRR: ‘What approaches to teaching a foreign language have been used, and what is the evidence on their effectiveness?’. However, despite the tight time constraints implied by a ‘rapid’ evidence assessment, our approach was very different from Ofsted’s. We began by searching for existing systematic reviews addressing the review questions. After initial screening, this resulted in 78 publications being long-listed for full-text review. We systematically assessed the existing reviews for relevance and quality, before selecting two or three of the most relevant and highest-quality publications as ‘seed reviews’, which we then updated through our own systematic search, screening and quality assessment of relevant empirical studies. We took precautions to ensure reliability at all stages of screening and quality

assessment. Finally, we synthesised the evidence we found in order to formulate recommendations for pedagogy. We documented our methods at every stage, so that the route from evidence to recommendations was transparent and replicable.

Given the power of the OCRR, we would have preferred to see a similarly rigorous and transparent approach being taken to their selection, assessment and synthesis of evidence. By way of comparison to the OCRR recommendation on explicit grammar teaching cited above, the section of our review focussing on explicit instruction concluded as follows:

While explicit instruction in grammatical features is effective, it is rarely more effective than other types of instruction in developing grammatical competence and should be tailored according to age and level of proficiency. (Murphy et al. 2020: 55)

Finally, we would note that within the extensive field of SLA research, learners like those in modern language classrooms in England are under-represented – that is, adolescent students with low L2 proficiency, learning languages other than English (LOTE) within very limited curriculum time. Given this distinctive constellation of characteristics, we believe that caution must be exercised when transferring research findings from other contexts to English modern languages classrooms. In relation to explicit grammar instruction, for example, we are not aware of a large body of research which has addressed this question in the specific context of Key Stage 3 modern languages learners. We would strongly advocate the conduct of more such research. Further, following the caveats expressed by Norris and Ortega (2000), we think it is important that the outcome measures should include not only discrete-point grammar tests, but also free language production (to see how well students actually apply their grammar knowledge in communication). Ideally, we also think it would be important for such studies to measure students' outcomes holistically, rather than focussing only on their knowledge of particular grammar features: for example, students' motivation and their progress in other aspects of language learning should also be considered. It is no good students being able to apply the correct endings to a verb if this is accompanied by boredom or even hostility towards the target language and its culture – a problem we have encountered amongst Key Stage 3 students in the past.

Conclusions

In sum, we are pleased to see Ofsted engaging with subject-specific pedagogy. As we said in our introduction, we believe that many of the OCRR's recommendations have much to commend them. However, as we have shown, we also have several reservations. Whatever the OCRR's good intentions, some of its recommendations may, in our view, hinder some aspects of successful language learning. Fundamentally, we worry that both teachers and learners may be drawn to focus too much on the individual building blocks of language, and lose sight of the bigger picture. Note that this is not to argue that the building blocks are unimportant; just that they are not all-important. Further, there are other building blocks or pillars that could be considered essential to language learning, such as intercultural understanding and strategic competence. Our concerns about the OCRR are inevitably amplified by the powerful status of Ofsted as the schools inspectorate. This review will not speak with a quiet voice.

We agree with Ofsted's fundamental approach of drawing on research evidence to inform curriculum design and pedagogy. However, given (a) the huge variety that exists between and within modern languages classrooms, (b) the vast complexity of the language learning process and (c) the existence of contrasting findings in many areas of SLA research, we believe that it would be prudent to ensure that any claims and recommendations are worded in suitably tentative language. We would prefer to see Ofsted's recommendations not as prescriptions but as hypotheses, in need of context-specific empirical research to determine their effectiveness.

Finally, we think it is also essential to acknowledge the central importance of teachers' contextualised professional judgment in determining what is most appropriate for their particular classroom

on any particular occasion. Ultimately, it is the students that matter most. Each section of the OCCR concludes with the words, 'Based on the above, high-quality languages education may have the following features'. However, in our view, when judging the effectiveness of language teaching, the focus should be not on what teachers planned to do, but on what the students have learnt. We would further suggest that this judgment of students' outcomes should be framed in terms of what the learners can do with the language and how they feel about it. We would like them to be able to express themselves and to access genuinely engaging written and spoken texts with confidence, despite potential gaps in their linguistic knowledge. We thus hope to take them on a journey of discovery into the target language and its culture, which they can approach with enjoyment, positivity and success.

Notes

1. We understand the term 'culture' broadly: it is not just 'great literature' (DfE 2013) but also pop music, TV programmes, the food people eat, how they celebrate birthdays – an overall way of seeing and being in the world.
2. https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/parent/3f462634n/file_sets/mg74qn789.
3. <https://resources.ncelp.org/concern/resources/9p2909442?locale=en>.
4. <https://pdcinmfl.com/online-language-learning-for-all-olla/>.

Disclosure statement

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