

Reading Reflection #8

Diversity & Inclusion of Sociopolitical Issues in Foreign Language Classrooms

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Personally, I think it is very interesting and rewarding to learn about other topics aside from the regular language-based topics in a language classroom. I think it's common enough to assume the next topic of choice in a language classroom would be the relevant culture(s) for that language. However, sometimes I feel that the "target culture" so to speak is brought up in a simplified, concentrated form that unintentionally encourages generalization and stereotypes. This was brought up in the article as well, when discussing how "teaching culture" is sometimes limited to fact rather than critical discussion (p 3). For example, I've heard that many of the Spanish classes on our campus focus on Latin American culture, even though culture in Spain is just as relevant to learning Spanish.

However, I can also imagine how difficult it is to teach culture that differs so greatly, especially when the language is affected by the differing culture as well. Perhaps this is another reason more critical cultural exploration tends to occur more so in advanced classes (p 6). In addition, it appears that some students would prefer not to cover deeper sociopolitical topics in their introductory language classes (p 9). I think that these students' opinion is heavily influenced by their language-learning model: emphasis on the language itself. As a foreign *language* class, I can see where students feel like learning about sociopolitical and cultural topics could be contrived as "off topic." However, if the additional topics seamlessly flowed with the language learning rather than as an add-on, then I think those students could come to see the new topics as beneficial to their language learning, even from a beginning level.

Another reason I feel it's important to learn about sociopolitical and other cultural topics in language classes is because it broadens the practical applications of your language skills. For example, in Japanese class if you only learn about traditional, stereotypical Japanese culture, then it will be rather difficult to hold a conversation about contemporary issues. However, if you practiced in the classroom with real lessons, then you could gain the foundations for an actual conversation. This is why I

think it's very beneficial to cover topics that relate to your own culture or current events in the world—even if it is not as thorough and in-depth as you could discuss in your native language, practice in the target language is the first step toward achieving that ability.

This is also why I think it's pretty hypocritical to tell students to learn “proper English” before studying another language (p 2). Because all language learners come from different backgrounds, their study habits and ways of thinking are all different in addition to their background knowledge in language. I also believe it's entirely possible to learn a new language alongside a language you are not completely fluent in. I met students while I studied abroad that were starting to learn their third language using their second language, which wasn't to “proper” standards, but didn't detract from their language learning experience. In addition, I've heard some professors tell foreign exchange students that they need higher-level English skills in order to take their classes, when really all they need is additional support. I think getting rid of the notion that “proper” primary language skill is a necessity for learning a secondary language would help alleviate some of the decline in minority foreign language majors.

Notes:

- AF under rep, fewer enter teachers (2)
- Idea of learning eng first, clc (2)
- Interesting to learn about other cultures in target language; you probably won't always use target lang to discuss target cult; refer to hs spanish, sa n spain (2)
- Usa as monoculture, connect w study abroad; incorrect way of introducing cult, stereotype-forming (3)
- Understand how difficult to juggle more than one topic in intro class (9)