

Lee, K. S. (2006). Understanding multicultural perspectives in foreign language education: A curricular and preservice teacher point of view. *Texas Foreign Language Association Journal*, 53(3), 44-51.

Understanding Multicultural Perspectives in Foreign Language Education:
A Curricular and Pre-service Teacher Point of View

Kathryn S. Lee, PhD

Texas State University-San Marcos

As our society changes, so must our foreign language education. We must address how newcomers to our profession adjust to these cultural and systemic changes. The first dramatic change in recent years to the Texas educational landscape was Texas' transformation into a majority minority state (US Census Bureau, 2005), which re-framed the underpinning foundations of second language education; many of the foreign languages taught in Texas schools are no longer second languages for an ever increasing percentage of our students. As foreign language educators, we have known that many of our students have been native speakers of what we have considered "foreign languages" for decades, but system wide attention to this socio-cultural and demographic shift gave us a framework to address these changes from a leadership role, since these changes aligned so closely with our discipline. Secondly, foreign language teachers needed to respond to the creation and implementation of state and national standards that now required educators to integrate culture throughout the curriculum. These standards, also known as the 5 C's, raised the placement of cultural content the classroom to the same priority levels as communication, connections, comparisons and communities (Castro, Sercu & Garcia, 2004; Phillips & Draper, 1999).

Educational researchers have studied the effectiveness of instructional strategies (Harris, Graham, & Deshler, 1998) and the use of technology to enhance foreign language learning (MacDonald & Heydon, 2003; Warschauer, 1999) within our discipline, but there was a deficit of in-depth case studies on how these changes were affecting teachers-in-training. This study delved deeply into the world of pre-service educators in relation to traditional questions about the profession of teaching foreign languages. I analyzed these newcomers' responses to qualitative interview protocols against the wealth of information that has been historically collected. I uncovered static trends that remained constant in our profession, as well as dynamic shifts that we will need to understand as these newcomers enter our profession. These newcomers' perceptions uncovered a map to changes in our discipline.

If foreign language teachers are expected to increase students' awareness of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, then what training did they receive as beginning teachers during their teacher preparation programs that supported these changes? Ultimately, the success of newcomers with these initiatives falls back on teacher education programs and how we responded to these changes. The purpose of this case study was to chronicle the perspectives of the foreign language education (FLE) pre-service teachers in my adolescent growth and development course regarding their understanding and incorporation of the new multicultural education standards after completion of the course, emphasizing intercultural competence.

Changing the Curriculum to Meet the New Standards

Aligning the Standards

Implementation of the Five Cs marked a paradigm shift (Phillips & Draper, 1999) that represented a systematic approach to teaching intercultural competence (Diaz-Greenberg & Nevin, 2003). In addition to meeting the ambitious objectives of teaching students a foreign linguistic code, educators had the responsibility to focus on the sociocultural aspects of foreign language education' The sociocultural contents included "social and cultural aspects of the countries where the foreign language is spoken, daily living and customs, human relationships, youth world, mass media...and international relationships" (Castro, Sercu & Garcia, 2004, p. 95).

Increased Expectations

Foreign language teachers were expected to increase students' awareness of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, and to incorporate more multicultural education into the curriculum in order to be culturally competent. I analyzed my own pedagogical practices in my undergraduate adolescent growth & development course and discovered that the sociocultural dimension of human development was not at the forefront of the curriculum; the multicultural content at best represented an "add on" approach. The cultural and curricular shifts in our discipline required me to re-evaluate and re-design my curriculum to align to the new expectations (Kroeger & Bauer, 2004). As part of the process, I collected qualitative data from two of my students who were foreign language educators.

Implementation of the Newly Designed Curriculum

The newly designed curriculum included opportunities for the pre-service teachers to read and discuss contemporary adolescent literature rich in diversity themes. *Tears of a Tiger* (Draper, 1996), *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2003), *Drummers of Jericho* (Meyer,

1995), and *Crazy Loco* (Rice, 2001) provided smooth segues into discussing sensitive topics and issues related to racism, sexual orientation, religious diversity and ethnicity. The use of literature distanced the students and eased the stress of discussing such emotionally sensitive issues, allowing students who did not have experiences with strong cultural content to be on more equal footing in classroom dialogues. Students were encouraged to take a cultural-response approach as they analyzed the multicultural literature, challenging “the students’ preconceived notions about another culture by increasing their cross-cultural understanding” (Dong, 2005, p. 56). They viewed the texts through the lens of cultural anthropologists, looking for cultural elements such as greetings, role relationships, and distinctive customs, courtesies, and conditions (David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, 1994). David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies developed the Culturgram as a “means of organizing and understanding different cultures and their characteristics” (Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 1999, pp. 186-187).

Reading and discussing the literature provided a powerful context “to increase students’ understanding of the complex ways in which race, ethnicity, language and social class interact to influence student behavior” (Banks et al., 2001, p. 198). All units within the adolescent development curriculum were challenged to embed the sociocultural dimensions of development, moving us away from an “add-on” approach.

Theoretical Bases

I reorganized the entire curriculum—emphasizing sociocultural theories and concepts to increase pre-service teachers’ understanding of cross-cultural awareness and competence.

The new curriculum galvanized the best of the previous curriculum with the following theories:

- Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological, contextual theory of development
- Models of cultural adaptation
- Ethnic identity development
- Effects of poverty on adolescent identity development
- Changing family structures
- Increased mobility of families (including immigration)
- Effects of economic strain on family systems
- Effects of media on adolescent development
- Necessity of differentiated instruction
- Benefits of cooperative learning
- Culturally responsive instruction

By the end of the semester I had *culturally sensitized* my curriculum, knowing it was more pedagogically appropriate, but I needed to collect data from the pre-service FLE students in the course to understand their perceptions on multicultural curriculum to see if my teaching changes translated into learning outcomes. Students majoring in foreign language provided me with insights as I provided them a unique opportunity to reflect on their experiences and relate them to their future actions in the classroom. I wanted to both test and cement the curricular changes I had made leading “to the experience of praxis, or a cycle of action-reflection-new action such as a self-awareness that can transform the individual’s experience of the world” (Diaz-Greenberg & Nevin, 2003, p. 216).

Method

Protocol Design

I designed the interview protocol to align with traditional teaching questions in foreign language education. The resulting semi-structured interview protocol centered on the following key questions:

- What made you decide to become a foreign language educator?
- Which book did you select for the Young Adult Literature discussion & why? Was there something in the literature that you learned or that confirmed a belief you already had?
- What school/region are you interested in teaching and why?
- What role do you see yourself as a foreign language educator in helping your students to increase their cultural awareness?

The interview questions were designed to ascertain the pre-service FLE teachers' viewpoints from past, present, and future perspectives. The sequence of the questions was designed to help frame the participants' responses over time.

Participants

Of the 100 students enrolled in Adolescent Growth and Development, three majored in foreign language education. The researcher invited the students to participate in an interview. One of the FLE students was excluded from the data because she withdrew from the course due to inadequate childcare accommodations. I thought this attrition may skew the data, so I decided to analyze the data from the remaining two FLE students. I invited each FLE student to an interview at the end of the semester after grades were posted. There was 100% participation from the two remaining foreign language majors.

General Methods

The researcher taught the students in the adolescent growth and development which emphasized preparing pre-service teachers to become competent multicultural educators. This qualitative, descriptive pilot case study took place at a large southwestern university during the fall of 2005. The participants were enrolled in a course designed to prepare pre-service teachers in the area of adolescent development.

Data were collected via interviews from the participants. Extensive notes were taken throughout the interview. The participants were asked to review the summarized interviews for accuracy during member checks. Transcripts of the interviews were transcribed, reviewed, analyzed, and thematically coded. “The reason the interviewer spends so much time talking to participants is to find out what their experience is and the meaning they make of it, and then to make connections among the experiences of people who share the same structure” (Seidman, 1998, p.110).

Findings

Becoming a Foreign Language Educator

Both students were immersed in Spanish speaking communities growing up. Michael (pseudonym) moved frequently during his public school years because his father was in the Navy. He spent considerable time in the southwestern US, attending schools with Spanish speaking peers. His passion for playing soccer provided him the opportunity to play with many South Americans, Central Americans, and Mexican Americans. He often felt like an “outsider” due to his geographic mobility. He reported, “I always felt a sense of compassion for immigrants.” He took Spanish in high school to further develop his Spanish speaking skills. “I liked being able to speak another language and being able to understand Spanish.” Michael worked many “blue collar jobs”, frequently working “side by side” with Spanish speaking cohorts.

Jorge’s parents were migrant workers. He was the seventh of eight siblings in his family. “Both of my parents made it very clear to all of my brothers and sisters that education was of utmost importance to them and that an educated person had no

limits as to what they could achieve in life.” His parents clearly expressed their desire that their children be bilingual. “My father was very patriotic. He worked for the Army. He was hired by the Texas Employment Commission.” English was spoken in Jorge’s home, yet his extended family spoke Spanish. “My extended family was so large. If a relative was marrying, we all joined together.” Padrinos (sponsors) paid for various parts of the wedding ceremony and celebration. When Jorge’s parents spoke Spanish, they “spoke it so well. They spoke Castilian Spanish.” Jorge has always embraced his Mexican heritage.

Both participants were raised in bilingual communities, reinforcing the importance of context related to career aspirations. Both were also “nontraditional students” in that they were older (mid 20’s and 30’s) than their counterparts in the adolescent growth and development class as well as married and “established” in the local community.

Selection of Literature

Michael chose *Crazy Loco* for his book discussion assignment. *Crazy Loco* included a collection of short stories written by David Rice. The setting of the collection of stories was in the *Valley* of South Texas, mixing fiction with “real life” experiences of the author. Michael was attracted to this literature because of its name. He said he really enjoyed reading the short stories because they seemed very familiar to him. “I hung out with rich kids and poor kids” like the protagonist in the stories. “I liked that he [the author] mixed Spanish and English in the same sentence. ‘*Mira!* Come with me.’” He also liked the stories, because many had humorous elements.

Jorge chose *Geography Club* for his book discussion. *Geography Club* is a young adult novel written about a group of gay and lesbian students dealing with coming to terms with their sexual orientation within a high school setting. Jorge chose this piece of literature randomly, without knowing anything about it. He said he enjoyed reading it because it provided him with more insight into the gay community. “My older sister is lesbian.” Jorge spent several summers with his older sister when he was nine or ten years old. They developed a very close relationship. He said his family seemed to know that she was gay but never spoke about it openly in the family. “My older sister resented my father.” Jorge said he thought she was frequently angry because she didn’t feel she could “come out” to her father, although she finally did a few years ago. Jorge also read *Crazy Loco*. “I could relate to the stories. I was an altar boy, just like the protagonist. I also remember our holiday celebrations as a boy and the decorations we displayed on a big tree on the property.”

Both participants expressed their enjoyment of the culturally rich literature, relating how the stories and their own experiences overlapped. Both expressed feelings of empathy with the characters and settings in the young adult literature selections. From their responses related to the literature, I could tell that they placed a high value on cultural diversity and appreciated the opportunity to read literature that reflected much of their culture in which they were raised.

Teaching Aspirations

Michael reported that he wanted to work in schools with diverse student populations. “I want to work in a district that’s evenly mixed with students from every

ethnicity: Asian, Indian, Persian, Black, White, and Hispanic.” Jorge’s priority was to teach near his home and his wife’s workplace. “I prefer to work in a small district such as my wife. My wife’s teaching there, and we live there.” As mentioned earlier, both pre-service teachers were living in the local area, and both participants wanted to teach near where they resided. Both are married to teachers and planned to teach and coach soccer.

Roles

In response to the question, “What role do you see yourself as a foreign language educator in helping your students to become more culturally aware?” Michael replied, “I’m not sure what to expect as far as what I can do in the classroom. I think it’s important to encourage kids to learn another language. It’s commonplace in other countries. The arrogance of Americans that it’s okay to be monolingual bothers me.” Michael also said, “No one really encouraged me to continue with my education. I want to emphasize the value of education with all of my students.” Michael said he experienced a “rollercoaster of learning experiences” due to the geographic mobility of his family. “Growing up was a nightmare—moving so much—everyone’s curriculum was so different. One move I’d be behind and lost and then after another move I’d be ahead and bored.”

Jorge responded confidently in how he would facilitate cultural awareness in his students. “You cannot teach Spanish without a sense of South American and Mexican culture.” According to Jorge, teaching Spanish requires having knowledge of Spanish history. For example, the Spanish word “*ojalá*” is an Arabic derivative referring to “*Allah*” meaning, “Be it God’s will.” Jorge said he also wants to teach Spanish using some of the old songs that originated as poems like “*Guantanamera*.” He reported he will

encourage his students to embrace their heritage and possess a strong sense of ethnic pride.

Discussion

Commonalities

Both participants were immersed in bilingual communities growing up. This common experience influenced their career decision to become foreign language educators. This commonality emphasized the importance of sociocultural context in career aspirations. Both expressed how much they enjoyed the young adult multicultural literature discussion in class and were animated as they discussed how they were able to relate personally to the literature. This supported the value of using multicultural literature to enrich teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of diversity (Nathenson-Mejia & Escamilla, 2003).

Differences

It is interesting to note the differences in their expression of self-efficacy related to implementing multicultural education into their future classrooms. Jorge expressed confidence in his ability to facilitate cultural awareness in his students; whereas, Michael expressed trepidation in how he would facilitate multicultural awareness in his classroom. Future researchers should explore these differences through the lens of ethnicity. Jorge is of Hispanic origin. Michael is White.

Notable differences existed in their family's expression of value concerning formal education. Jorge's family explicitly stated the value of education. In contrast, Michael received little support from family or teachers, yet both were near completion of their coursework necessary for teacher certification.

Implications for future research

What struck me most intently from the interviews with these FLE pre-service students in this pilot study was their enthusiasm and interest in participating in the study. They both were genuinely motivated to contribute in this research project and expressed appreciation of having their voices heard. Participation of FLE pre-service students in this study helped them in the process of becoming “critical consumers of research” (Gitlin, Barlow, Burbank, Kauchak, & Stevens, 1998).

Using FLE pre-service students as participants in research provided numerous opportunities for exploration of vital issues. Future research is needed in exploring how multicultural education knowledge and intent to implement multicultural education into the classroom actually transfers into classroom teaching. Also worthy of investigation is exploring factors leading to a career choice in foreign language education as well as factors leading to retention of FLE teachers in education.

This study has reminded me of how much experience and prior knowledge students bring with them to the learning experience, which reinforces the value of reflection in the learning process and the value of becoming “reflective practitioners.” In Freire’s (1998) words, “As women and men [and teachers], simultaneously reflecting on themselves and the world, increase the scope of their perceptions, they begin to [re]direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena (p. 63)” (as cited in Milner, 2003, p. 196).

Conclusions

It will be interesting to see to what extent these two pre-service foreign language

educators emphasize the sociocultural aspects of foreign language in their classrooms. This is an area for future research. My hope is that they will balance their devotion between linguistic objectives and cultural objectives in the classroom. The idea that I have encouraged these and other pre-service teachers in acknowledging and honoring their students' diversity enriched me throughout the study. "I will celebrate myself as an educator and total person. I can, and should, also celebrate every moment I spend in self-critique, however difficult and painful, because it will make me a better educator. And that is something to celebrate!" (Gorski, 2006).

Curricular changes have already begun to re-shape our discipline. It is up to us, as teacher educators, if we will embrace these changes and re-design our classes to meet these higher standards for cultural inclusion. Will we drag our feet and wait for curriculum to be handed to us or will we lead the way, giving our students a voice in the process? Through a research approach we can improve our own curriculum, evaluate our students' understanding of the new standards, and contribute to FLE classrooms for decades to come so that all voices are accepted in whatever language or other cultural expression they bring to the classroom or hope to take from it.

References

- Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W.D., Irvine, J.J., Nieto, S., Schofield, J.W., & Stephan, W. G. (2001). Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 3, 196-203.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2000). Ecological theory. In A. Kazdin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology*. Washington DC and New York: American Psychological Association and Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, L., Campbell, B. & Dickinson, D. (1999). *Teaching and learning through multiple intelligences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Castro, P., Sercu, L. & Garcia, M. (2004). Integrating language-and-culture teaching: An investigation of Spanish teachers' perceptions of the objectives of foreign language education. *Intercultural Education*, 15, 1.
- David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies (1994). *Culturgram*. Provo: Brigham Young University.
- Diaz-Greenberg, R. & Nevin, A. (2003). Listen to the voices of foreign language student teachers: Implication for foreign language educators. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 3, 3.

- Dong, Y.R. (2005). Taking a cultural-response approach to teaching multicultural literature. *English Journal*. 94 (3), 55-60.
- Draper, S. M. (1994). *Tears of a tiger*. New York, New York: Simon Pulse.
- Gitlin, A., Barlow, L. Burbank, M.D., Kauchak, D. & Stevens, T. (1998). Pre-service teachers' thinking on research: Implications for inquiry oriented teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 15, 753-769.
- Gorski, P. (2006). *Multicultural pavilion*. Retrieved March 3, 2006, from <http://www.edchange.org>
- Harris, K.R., Graham, S. & Deshler, D. (Ed). (1998). *Teaching every child every day: Learning in diverse schools and classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.
- Hartinger, B. (2003). *Geography club*. New York, New York: HarperCollins Children's Books.
- Kroeger, S. D., & Bauer, A. M. (2004). *Exploring diversity: A video case approach*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Lent, W.L., Brown, S.D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of*

Vocational Behavior, 45(1), 79-122.

MacDonald, K. & Heydon, R. (2003). A touch of...class! *Canadian Modern Language Review*. 59(3), pp. 455-475

Mau, W.J., Ellsworth, R., Hawley, D. & Mau, Y. (N.D.). *Finding leakage in the pipeline of teacher supply: Factors influencing youngsters to aspire to and stay in teaching careers*. This study is supported by a grant from Association for Institutional Research-National Center for Educational Statistics-National Science Foundation. Retrieved August 27, 2006 from [http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/aces/AIR Final report.pdf](http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/aces/AIR%20Final%20report.pdf)

Meyer, C. (1995). *Drummers of Jericho*. San Diego, California: Gulliver Books.

Milner, H.R. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*. 6(2), 193-208.

Nathenson-Mejia, S. & Escamilla, K. (2003). Connecting with Latino children: Bridging cultural gaps with children's literature. *Bilingual Research Journal*. 27(1), 101-116.

- Ndura, E. (2004). Teachers' discoveries of their cultural realms: Untangling the web of cultural identity. *Multicultural Perspectives*. 6(3), 10-16.
- Phillips, J. & Draper, J. (1999) *The Five C's: Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. New York: Heinle.
- Rice, D. (2001). *Crazy loco*. New York, New York: Dial Books.
- Santrock, J. W. (2005). *Adolescence*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sellami, A. L. (2000). *Teaching towards cultural awareness and intercultural competence: From what through how to why culture is?* Paper presented at Annual Meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2005). *Texas becomes nation's newest 'majority-minority' state*. Retrieved August 27, 2006, from <http://www.census.gov/PressRelease/www/releases/archives/population/005514.html>

Warschauer, M. (1999). *Electronic literacies: Language, culture, and power in online education*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Foreign language teachers have traditionally been trained to think of themselves as teaching one L2 to speakers of one L1. They rely on in-group understanding of the shared associations and allusions indexed by the words, and most of the time, they are satisfied with understanding each other not exhaustively but "for all practical purposes" (Goffman, 1959). This kind of foreign language education systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language. A multilingual mindset draws students' attention to point of view and perspective in the way speakers frame their utterances, writers frame their sentences. * The increase in foreign language enrollments and the shortage of qualified teachers may require foreign language teachers to teach at more grade levels than they have in the past. * The emphasis on technology for language learning and teaching requires teachers to keep informed about new technologies and their instructional uses. Skills and knowledge foreign language teachers need. In addition to demonstrating "competencies in the general areas of education, interpersonal skills, and professional education" (Met, 1989, p. 177), good foreign language teachers need the following: * Teacher education must shift from a focus on preservice training alone to lifelong professional development. Recent papers in Intercultural competence in foreign language education. Papers. People. Attitudes of Tertiary Level EFL Teachers towards Intercultural Foreign Language Teaching. Language and culture are two interwoven concepts; therefore, intercultural instruction needs to be an indispensable component of foreign language teaching. Accordingly, data were collected from a total of 100 Turkish EFL teachers employed at thirty different universities in Turkey by means of a questionnaire on intercultural foreign language teaching. Following the data collection, the data were analyzed statistically. Findings showed that the participant EFL teachers exerted a positive attitude in relation to intercultural foreign language teaching.