
Globalizing Foreign and Second Language Instruction

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As foreign and second language educators, a key part of our job is to help students communicate in the target language through the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, in many traditions a broader role is conceived for educators. Additionally and perhaps most importantly, language educators are charged with preparing students for citizenship in the community, the nation, and the world.

The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in conjunction with the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) have called for global perspectives in foreign and second language education, defining global perspectives as developing the “knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism, and increasing interdependence” (NCSS, 1982: 1-2).

The last few years have seen concentrated efforts by professionals to build connections between the teaching of foreign languages and the social studies. The global education movement has particular relevance for both fields since the study of cultures plays a major role in both disciplines.

Culture Teaching in F/SL Education

Over the last two decades, foreign and second language education and cultural studies have enlarged their scope. Originally FL/ESL teachers taught only about the specific cultural area of their language specialty. In later years, teachers were encouraged to include any other areas where the target language was spoken. More recently, with the advent of global education, language teachers are being asked to teach culture by comparing the cultures of two or more different countries to provide students with more of a global perspective.

The concept of culture, with regard to FL/ESL education, has broadened. The term “culture” has two widely accepted principal definitions: it can be defined as the contributions of high civilization, such as literature, art, music, sculpture and philosophy—usually referred to as “culture with a capital C.” These factors combined with the history, geography, and the economic development of the country form the sociological approach to culture. Culture may also be used to signify the lifestyles

and behavioral patterns of the people. This phase of culture is referred to as “culture with a small c” or the anthropological approach to culture. This anthropological approach to culture comprises the country’s religion, daily life, customs, standard of living, and social traits. The former deals with the past, while the latter focuses on everyday life or the present.

In the past, the first category, that of the sociological approach to culture, largely provided the material for the study of the culture of a foreign people. The students were taught facts about the geography and history of the target country and an attempt was made to acquaint them with the country’s major contributions to the world of art, literature, and music. Daily life and customs of the people were not completely ignored but particular emphasis was not placed on this important facet of culture.

However, with the introduction of several new methods of foreign language and ESL instruction, the attitude towards the teaching of culture has changed drastically. Emphasis is now placed on the way of life of the people rather than on their historical achievements. The anthropological point of view or the “deep culture” as Brooks (1968) calls it is now readily accepted. According to Bragaw, Loew, and Wooster (1981), this “small c” culture approach is compatible with education for a global perspective in that it emphasizes the universality of cultural institutions across national boundaries, language groups, and socio-economic ranges.

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As a result of an increased emphasis on “small c” culture teaching, educators are moving away from the factual information about the target country to a more comprehensive view of the country and its people (Bragaw *et al.*, 1981; Strasheim, 1981). According to Strasheim (1981), the first step toward globalizing any discipline has to be learning to perceive global education as a construct into which all disciplines fall. She stresses that global education is an all-inclusive organizing principle, not an add-on innovation for Monday morning.

Bragaw, Loew, and Wooster (1983) offer three change strategies to help teachers and schools foster a global perspective in their teaching: global or self-management skills, cultural universals, and global concepts.

Global skills refer to the development of skills that encourage greater tolerance for and understanding of the similarities and differences existing among people. These skills help analyze the ways in which an individual thinks, feels and acts in relation to others, Bragaw *et al* (1983) suggest that these skills act as organizers for lessons in language classes. They also contend that although students can communicate with people from another culture, they cannot relate effectively unless they possess these

skills. The self-management skills which can act as goals to globalize a language classroom are: 1) decreasing egocentric perceptions; 2) decreasing ethnocentric perceptions; 3) decreasing stereotypic perceptions; 4) increasing the ability to empathize; 5) developing constructive attitudes toward diversity; 6) developing constructive attitudes toward change; 7) developing constructive attitudes toward ambiguity and, 8) developing constructive attitudes toward conflict.

The second change strategy is that of planning around cultural universals. These universals are those themes or concepts that are cross-cultural in nature or shared to some degree by every culture or society. The form of each theme may differ greatly within or between cultures but its universality remains the same across cultures.

Cleaveland, Craven and Danfelter (1979:8) list the universals of culture as follows: 1) material culture (food, clothing, shelter, transportation and personal possessions); 2) the arts, play and recreation (forms and types of art, play and recreation and standards of taste and beauty); 3) language and nonverbal communication; 4) social organization (societies, families, and kinship systems); 5) social control (systems and governmental institutions, rewards and punishments); 6) conflict and warfare; 7) economic organization (systems of trade and exchange, producing and manufacturing, property, labor, and standard of living; 8) education; and 9) world view (belief system and religion).

These themes point out that whatever way people may behave, their lives are unique only in the form, not in the basic structure of their experience. To infuse a global perspective, language teachers may organize cultural units around the topics listed above.

The third change strategy is that of planning a class around global concepts. Bragaw, Loew, and Wooster (1983) define global concepts as being large, all encompassing ideas applicable across cultures and across time. A list of such concepts would include freedom, interdependence, education and justice, among others. The authors suggest that language lessons can build on or incorporate an aspect of one or more of these global concepts.

Conclusion

Moving toward a global perspective in FL/ESL education will require changes in thinking and in practice for many language educators. With the change strategies mentioned in this article one has a framework on which to build. These strategies suggest how a global dimension might be infused into a foreign or second language classroom, but experts in the field stress that no one technique as described here is satisfactory in itself when it comes to teaching culture with a global perspective.

References

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