

AAUSC Issues in Language Program Direction 2010

Critical and Intercultural Theory and Language Pedagogy

Glenn S. Levine

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Editors



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Program Direction 2010:
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Library of Congress Control Number: 2010937494

ISBN-13: 978-0-495-80007-1

ISBN-10: 0-495-80007-4

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Chapter 9

From Core Curricula to Core Identities: On Critical Pedagogy and Foreign Language/Culture Education

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Abstract

This chapter argues that some form of critical pedagogy should be promoted and sustained in foreign language/culture education despite current ideological and social challenges to the paradigm. It is not readily apparent what form a twenty-first-century critical pedagogy, as a theoretically grounded praxis, should take. One option would be Gerald Graff's systematic, curriculum-centered approach, which advocates the teaching of academic controversies. A second would derive from a classroom-centered, "bottom-up" approach as represented by Ira Shor, which focuses on the needs and concerns of those we teach. A third model, and the one argued for in this chapter, would develop an identity-centered, psychologically informed approach to developing students' compassion in relation to others while examining the core causes of human behavior, based primarily on the work of Bracher (2006). At stake is whether foreign language/culture learners might respond to a "prosocial" pedagogy and revise their conventional "information-processing scripts" so as to approach or mediate other languages/cultures with communicative and also with ethical competence.

Introduction

The devaluation of foreign language/culture education in the United States continues despite renewed calls to improve it in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Whether its ongoing crisis is ultimately attributable to the anti-intellectual ideology of American society or to an American mythology of isolation from the rest of the world, one thing is clear: it is unjust to persist in blaming ourselves, that is, foreign language/culture educators. At the same time as our fields of practice continue to be in crisis, we are repeatedly called on to justify our efforts in an adversarial public sphere in which pundits insist that educators need to overcome their presumed "lack of accountability"—at least financially if not socially or ethically. In a context such as this, it is important to disentangle the present issues from the core structural problems in order to focus intellectual energy on the latter.

This chapter assumes that some form of critical pedagogy ought to be developed and sustained not only in education generally but also in foreign language/culture education in particular. My aim here, in the process of reviewing the options available, is to ascertain which form of critical pedagogy would be most effective and useful in the current climate. For even though critical pedagogy is a well-established body of theoretically informed practices, it is not readily apparent what version of it can or should be implemented in an environment that

is set on ignoring or taming it. Should we adopt a curriculum-centered approach, as proposed by Gerald Graff, that requires the systematic teaching of academic controversies, on the assumption that these are “teachable moments”? Or should we engage in a classroom-centered, bottom-up model, following Ira Shor, that focuses principally on the needs and concerns of the (majority of) student-learners whom we educate? Or is perhaps a third way most appropriate, an identity-centered approach that seeks to link both curricular and classroom paradigms by focusing on students’ social and psychological development? I argue here that this third approach, in part a synthesis of the first two, may be particularly effective in countering resistance to critical pedagogy in foreign language/culture education and elsewhere.

While I outline some of the methods available for enacting an effective critical pedagogy in this chapter, my approach assumes that critical inquiry—including the questioning of dearly held assumptions—is at least as important in the foreign language/culture classroom as are manageable solutions to discrete difficulties that might be addressed by “teaching tips.” In alignment with ecological perspectives on language acquisition/socialization, a warrant of my approach is what Claire Kramsch (2002) has called the “poststructuralist realization that learning is a nonlinear relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory” (p. 5).

Critical Pedagogies for “Translingual and Transcultural” Competence

The primary objective of critical pedagogy is “to critically appropriate forms of knowledge outside of [our] immediate experience, to envisage versions of a world which is ‘not yet’ in order to alter the grounds on which life is lived” (Simon, 1988, p. 2). Such knowledge must go “beneath surface meaning . . . dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, [in order] to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse” (Shor, 1992, p. 129). Kumaravadivelu (2006) points out that researchers in second-language interactional analysis, to take a related foreign languages example, “have shied away from any serious engagement with the ideological forces acting upon classroom discourse” (p. 73).

As a result, another warrant of the model of critical pedagogy proposed here is that the study of a foreign language/culture is uniquely capable of assisting students to increase their capacity for understanding others (for the purposes of this chapter, also designated as “the Other”). Put another way, in this chapter, I also assume that it is important for foreign language educators to be concerned with increasing students’ awareness of the Other, including Others’ suffering and/or their perceived lack of accountability for their problems, issues, or crises. In lieu

of what he and others (e.g., Byram, 2008; Reagan & Osborne, 2002) view as the inadequately critical status quo in foreign language education, Kumaravadivelu (1999) proposes a “critical classroom discourse analysis,” according to which

negotiation of discourse meaning and its analysis should not be confined to the acquisitional aspects of input and interaction, or to the instructional imperatives of form/function focused language learning activities; instead, they should also take into account discourse participants’ complex and competing expectations and beliefs, identities and voices, fears and anxieties. (p. 472)

The Modern Language Association (MLA) Ad Hoc Committee Report (MLA, 2007) specifically calls on students to learn “to *reflect* [emphasis added] on the world and themselves as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves as Americans—that is, as members of a society that is *foreign* [emphasis added] to others” and not merely to function as “informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language” (pp. 4–5).

In the manner of ecological perspectives, all three of the models of critical pedagogy discussed here are both “relational” and reflective. Thus, in addition to helping students develop empathy with the suffering (or pleasures) of others, the study of a foreign language/culture should assist them in reflecting on what is conventionally held to be *knowledge*, *experience*, and *power* in various sectors of society.

Yet a reexamination of these issues is much older than Foucault’s (1985, 1986) discussions of the knowledge/power nexus. Rather, such “relational” reflection intervenes in discussions dating back to John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and other major theorists of education. Again, such discussions go beyond the “merely theoretical,” affirming a pragmatism to be found in both Dewey and Vygotsky. Consequently, the recent MLA/Association of Departments of Foreign Languages proposal of 2008 titled “Transforming College and University Foreign Language Departments” calls on language/culture curricula “to produce a specific outcome: educated users of a language in addition to English who have deep *translingual and transcultural competence* [emphasis added] in that language and English” (Pratt et al., 2008, p. 289).

Teaching (Academic) Conflicts and Controversies

Pratt and her coauthors urge that that their 2008 proposal be translated into action—and very soon. The idea of this chapter is that critical pedagogy provides one such paradigm for realizing such proposals, especially inasmuch as it is itself already a “translingual and transcultural” field of inquiry. To be sure, critical pedagogy may be seen as too “radical” or too “theoretical” for some. After all, when foreign language/culture educators are not engaged in humanistic inquiry with our students, we tend to fall back on instrumentalist rationales for our importance, such as the applied value of our offerings in improving globalized commerce or the equally globalized “War on Terror.”

By contrast, critical pedagogy is by definition open to the notion that education is a culture of inquiry. Its aim is to reinvigorate education as a site for a learning praxis “committed to problematizing and not problem solving, to complicating and not resolving issues” (Slevin, 2002, p. 53). If we are truly involved in critical inquiry and critical pedagogy, then we need to apply those approaches that level the playing field “not just by bringing academic norms and expectations into the open but through classroom practices explicit in their interrogation and critique of those norms” (Slevin, 2002, p. 53).

Such approaches might be seen as immoderate or even dangerous. When translated into classroom practices, such a critical pedagogy

focuses on an ethic of responsibility, on the valuing of difference, on negotiation and collaboration, on inclusion, on shared attempts at critical understanding. . . . [It] cannot easily occur in a 10- or 14-week parcel of time; nor can it develop easily in cramped and inhospitable and highly institutionalized, much less disembodied electronic “virtual,” spaces. Even less can it develop where the system of rewards (grades) is linked thoroughly to traditional models of authority and to notions of institutional hierarchy and autonomous individualism. (Lunsford, 1996, p. 437)

Of course, many progressive or critical educators restrict themselves to discussions of “solo acts of teaching,” as Gerald Graff (1996, p. 427) points out in a rebuttal to this and similar arguments. Graff, founder in 1991 of Teachers for a Democratic Society, is best known for his call to “teach the conflicts.”¹ His approach has broad implications for classroom pedagogy and curricular design in universities. Its point of departure is that within and between disciplines, there are conflicts of many kinds—philosophical, epistemological, and so on. Unless we wish to shield students from these controversies, our curricula need to be restructured as conversations. If curricula do not become more dialogic, Graff (1996) reasons, students will continue to suffer from “severe cognitive dissonance” (p. 426). The dominant paradigm of “to each her own classroom” shelters us “from the criticisms of our assumptions to which we would risk exposing ourselves if our courses were in dialogue” (p. 429). In the interim, students get bounced back and forth between non-communicating teachers or balkanized in separate (sub)disciplines. What Graff deems that a confusing, “à la carte” approach to curriculum does little to foster students’ capacities for reflection or critical judgment.

Yet the insular notion of the classroom leaves teachers unexposed to the disagreements of their peers. “Although we professors are routinely accountable to peer criticism,” writes Graff (1996), “when we publish articles and books or speak at conferences, this normal accountability is curiously assumed to cease once we enter ‘the classroom’” (p. 429). Although he does not advocate a legislated form of accountability, Graff at times appears to presuppose an idealized speech community and/or Habermasian model of the public sphere. Graff’s method has been critiqued as assuming a “fiction of liberal neutrality” (Nelson, 1997, p. 91). Similarly, the controversies Graff and others wish to teach are fundamentally confined to the university per se. The conflicts scholars tend to disavow are the broader,

culturally embedded ones, for social inequalities reproduced in the professor–student relationship almost certainly interfere with pedagogy, rendering it—in foreign language/culture education and elsewhere—a less effective endeavor.

Teaching (the) Class

Ira Shor is frequently cited in discussions of pedagogies that are “democratic-critical” or “Freirean”—named for Paulo Freire, arguably the “founder” of critical pedagogy (Freire 2004; Freire & Shor, 1987). Shor has also debated Graff in public forums. In his 1996 book *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in Critical Pedagogy*, Shor insists that

before “teaching the conflicts” among scholars in any field, we first need to face the always already-existing conflicts between students and the teacher, between students and the institution, between students and the economic system (class, gender, racial inequities), and between the students themselves (over issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, physical ability, appearance, choice of major, career competitiveness against each other for grades, etc.). (pp. 17–18)

Shor argues that if we begin our courses by introducing canonical subject matter or academic conflicts in a field, we have overlooked the destructive power of the conflicts that predetermine students’ attitudes and perceptions. For “teaching any disciplinary material, including the academic conflicts among scholars, before negotiating the curriculum with students [in order] to share power, only front-loads the process with official authority” (p. 18). Teaching scholarly controversies renders students “silenced spectators in an education being done *to* them for their own good, not being done *by* them or *with* [emphasis added] them” (p. 18). While some foreign language/culture educators might claim that many of their classrooms are truly student centered (for a critique of their claim, see Kumaravadivelu, 2006, chap. 4), there may be few classrooms where the students are so disempowered or silent, especially when authority is implicitly granted to the native (or near-native) speaker. Further, as long as struggles for hegemony take place in a classroom or an institution, one ought to be teaching *to* and *through* these struggles, not merely *about* them. Such struggles may be exacerbated particularly in foreign language/culture education, in which students’ “complex and competing expectations and beliefs, identities and voices, fears and anxieties” come to the fore (Kumaravadivelu, 1999, p. 472). Critical approaches to curriculum such as Graff’s otherwise appear to be condemned to irrelevance. While Shor’s approach might be more successful in building a classroom community out of a diverse group of learners, he freely admits that “democratic practices in one classroom do not mean that school and society have been democratized” (Shor, 1996, p. 220). Rather, his method is to privilege dialogue that foregrounds student discourse in confronting “unilateral authority at every turn, in every course, in every social institution” (p. 221).

In directly addressing Shor's "student-centered" approach, Graff (in Graff, 2003) divulges that in his own teaching, "students would often still feel silenced or intimidated when disagreement broke out or when we criticized their work" (pp. 268–269). Yet Graff's response has been to diagnose the "shyness and passivity" of some students as a problem that is "cognitive" at its core instead of admitting that he had previously "not paid enough attention to the emotional and personal dimensions of academic conflict" (p. 269). Not until Graff had team taught in 2002 with Jane Tompkins (at the University of Illinois at Chicago) did it occur to him that "too often we were unable to make the [academic or scholarly] issues clear and compelling enough for those students to understand what the issues were and why they should give a damn about them" (p. 270). The same clarification would have to be made in the foreign language classroom, for it may be more difficult for students to understand what *those* issues are and just how they are relevant to them.

The practice of academic controversy proposed by Graff may leave students not only uninterested or unmotivated but also confined to the campus unless the disciplinary and systemic determinants of professor–student conflict are themselves dealt with. Although "core curricula" such as Graff's may have the potential to democratize or improve higher education, they may be ineffective if the social inequalities of the professor–student relationship are not addressed first. "The status quo presents opening obstacles to critical thought and democratic process," Shor (1996, p. 16) notes. He and other advocates of a similar type of critical pedagogy maintain that Graff's well-known proposal cannot be realized as long as classrooms reproduce the struggle for hegemony. Shor thus proposes a variation on *realpolitik*. We ought to "blame ourselves less for some of the restrictions or limits that we discover in experimenting and transforming, and understand that we're pushing against some powerful limits set by the climate. What we can do, we accomplish inside a specific setting in a real history" (Shor, 1997).

And I might add that what we can do, we accomplish inside a specific setting in a real history with real people.

Teaching (Prosocial) Identity: Psychological and Ethical Dimensions of Critical Pedagogy

The third model of critical pedagogy to be considered in this chapter strives to enhance students' social and psychological development. It is also an ethical approach inasmuch as it fosters students' compassion toward others in the process of examining the root causes of human behavior.² At stake in this third model of critical pedagogy is whether students are sociopsychologically capable of learning differently. Indeed, students of foreign language/culture, perhaps more than in other disciplines, are specifically asked to revise their conventional "information-processing scripts"³ in order to identify causes of Others' behavior. Inasmuch as they are being asked to identify with the cultures and languages of these Others,

they too are being asked to give up more control than usual, especially those taking (beginning-level) courses in a foreign language/culture.

In such a cognitive and emotional pedagogy of identity or identities, students are prompted to imagine what it is or would be like to *be* another person in his or her linguistically and culturally specific circumstances. If students and also *teacher*-learners work on establishing a metacognition of their information processing—keeping a journal, for instance, of their thoughts, emotions, and action orientations when encountering real and fictionalized others—they are in a better position to assess whether they have responded to these others with adequate information-processing scripts.

The ultimate objective of what I call an identity-centered, psychologically informed critical pedagogy is to help students develop *prosocial* metacognition in order to recognize and interrupt *antisocial* processing scripts whenever they have begun to activate them. Students are also assisted in recognizing when they have encountered those apparatuses that promote such antisocial processing scripts—the media, news formats and cycles, entertainment genres, and so on. In this third model of critical pedagogy, students learn to substitute more adequate, or prosocial, processing scripts for the flawed, or antisocial, ones. This aim is achieved by having student-learners keep *reflective* journals that document their own and others' uses of adequate and inadequate processing scripts. Such journaling is equally important, even for students just beginning to learn about a foreign language/culture.

The warrant of this third path to critical pedagogy is that an ethical and identity-informed approach grounds the critique of educational and other norms in a compelling theory of human development. According to its leading theorist, Mark Bracher (2006), improvements in teaching are illusory as long as we fail to examine identity issues faced by students and teachers. Bracher illustrates how the restructuring of students' identity components can alter the conditions under which learning takes place. This restructuring presumes that educators themselves begin to reflect systematically on the factors that motivate antisocial behaviors. As an identity-centered critical pedagogy, it focuses on revealing the emotional and cognitive capacities needed by students to learn, develop, and engage in "prosocial" behavior.

Now language itself, according to the MLA Report, "reveals us to others and to ourselves" (MLA, 2007, p. 5). In addition to synthesizing this constitutive view of language with psychology and cognitive science, Bracher's approach aims to explicate the root causes of crime, violence, substance abuse, racism, sexism, and homophobia. In the following, I would like to present some of Bracher's ideas that appear particularly relevant and useful for a critical-pedagogy perspective on foreign language/culture teaching and learning. His aim is to (re)integrate the study of literary and other texts not only into the fabric of our curriculum but also into students' subjective experiences of encountering the Other through language/culture study.

Bracher recalls at the outset of his *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, and Social Transformation* the insight of psychologist James Gilligan that "people will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual

or group identity” (Gilligan, 1996, p. 97, cited in Bracher, 2006, p. 3). In other words, humans are even more willing to risk biological than “ideological” death, that is, the demise of their sense of “self” in relation to implicit “others.” Yet at the same time, our sense of self as humans is destabilized whenever we render “criminals,” “addicts,” and “terrorists” as externalized receptacles for our own antisocial or aggressive impulses. The senseless pursuit of “identity-protecting” scapegoats, according to Bracher, can lead us to seek the punishment of “not only violent offenders but also individuals and groups who are themselves the victims of misfortune and injustice, such as the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the uninsured, and racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities” (p. 6).

Whenever people belonging to such minorities are denied recognition, they have been denied a fundamental human need and hence a crucial motivation for personal learning and development. This need for recognition more than compensates for the identity support we lose if we relinquish our practices of “demonizing violent Others and externalizing our own disowned violent impulses onto them” (Bracher, 2006, p. 137). Consequently, in order to acquire secure, well-supported identities, students and, of course, their teachers must *integrate* rather than *exclude* those elements of the self that are harmful when enacted in different contexts. Among the types of recognition we must integrate, Bracher includes (1) the public self, that is, “those parts of oneself that one acknowledges and freely displays to others in hopes of their being recognized”; (2) the private self, that is, “elements that one . . . yearns to have others recognize and accept but that one hides from others”; and (3) the unconscious elements of oneself that “one is unaware of possessing because one has disowned them” (p. 164).

This third form of recognition (of the “unconscious” elements of the self) has particular consequences: while teachers also have a need for acknowledgment and affirmation, such a need can result in practices that undermine their efforts to facilitate student development. By owning up to some measure of narcissism or even rage, educators may achieve the prosocial recognition of what social psychologist Erik Erikson (1964) called our “need to be needed” (p. 130, cited in Bracher, 2006, p. 149). In his critique of “identity-undermining pedagogies,” Bracher (2006, chaps. 6 and 7) effectively documents the failures of teachers to engage in various kinds of self-reflection. Following Erikson (1964), for whom “the teaching passion is not restricted to the teaching profession” (p. 131), Bracher posits a fundamental need to teach, itself subtended by a generative identity. But how might one specifically enact this generative desire to support the identity development of oneself *and* others, namely, the students?

While many who teach language/culture would agree that integrated, self-reflective identities are an ideal outcome of our curricula and teaching practices, at times (and unwittingly) we practice authoritarian pedagogies. To be sure, the fields of English and foreign languages/cultures have made significant antiauthoritarian strides since the 1960s. But even progressives and leftists have socialized students into desiring forms of disciplinary authority, going so far as to contend that young people should be consulting canonical or “core” works of literature when faced with (even practical) difficulties in their lives. In the case of Graff’s “teaching the conflicts,” discussed above, students are in effect asked to consult

great works of scholarship rather than attending to their own experiences and capabilities. By the standards of such pedagogies, the students said to be the best are those who eschew naive or uncritical modes of interpretation. In that process, women, minorities, and other subaltern students are called on to reduce their incompatibility with their teachers. They therefore learn to integrate themselves into those larger institutional or cultural systems their teachers represent. In a criticism that bears reproducing in full here, Bracher (2006) maintains that

the spectacle we offer our students of authoritative, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic subjects passionate about literature—that is, as subjects who appear to know how to become whole and recapture lost *jouissance* through literary study—functions in the same way as an advertisement of an attractive and satisfied individual enjoying a cigarette: both the teacher's performance and such advertisements elicit identification with the subject supposed to know, which promotes replication in the students or the advertisements' audience of this subject's identity. While our conscious pedagogical intentions might be more noble and the direct results less destructive than those of cigarette advertisements, the transference effect and identity damage of such pedagogical practice are the same. (p. 94)⁴

It is therefore crucial to keep just as critical an eye on ourselves, the critical pedagogues, and underscore that not only authoritarian pedagogies but also unreflective pedagogies of resistance or “empowerment” can threaten the core identities of students. Here we may valuably contrast such pedagogies with the primary objective of psychologically informed education: to enable individuals to intervene in the formation of their own identities. For instance, when a patient in therapy demands to know “what his problem is,” an identity-centered psychologist would not immediately attempt to provide him or her with answers. Rather, he or she would help the patient develop the capacity to form his or her own answers. Doing so thus requires the psychologist to abstain from the role of an ideal ego (or imaginary Other) despite the patient's efforts to address him or her as such. When the psychologist resists such expectations, the patient is compelled to recognize a difference between the “I” who speaks and the idealized ego projected onto the psychologist.

To clarify just the sort of “self” this third model of critical pedagogy proposes, consider a cautionary tale from the beginnings of critical pedagogy. The workers in Paulo Freire's literacy classes in 1980s Brazil were notably uncomfortable with his dialogic pedagogy, telling him, “You're the one who should have been talking, sir. You know things, sir. We don't” (Freire, 2004, p. 36). The deference shown toward Freire was a repetition of the authoritarian relations these workers experienced in their daily lives. These learners “transferred” onto the person of Freire the position of master. From this, he learned that if students were to become more aware of the forms of oppression in society, then he would have to allow for the repetition of those relations within the controlled space of the classroom:

As these forms of oppression are rooted in authoritarian relations, repeating them in the classroom will inevitably involve transferring authoritarian positions—the Patriarch, the Bourgeois, the

Colonizer, the Bigot—onto the person of the teacher insofar as the teacher occupies the position of the “subject who is supposed to know.” (Cho, 2009, p. 108)

Just as Freire had to control his responses and distance himself from authoritarian relations in the classroom, Jacques Lacan (2002) calls on fellow psychologists to refuse to reproduce such relations. This “refusal to reply,” which he terms the “analyst’s abstention” (p. 93), can be applied to the teacher/student relationship. This abstention, when redeployed by a teacher, is designed to undercut the student’s tendency to identify with the teacher as the ideal form of subjectivity. While such imaginary relations may seem to be important in an effective teaching experience, teachers should hinder their development. By implication, some students will enact identities that thoroughly reproduce those of their teachers. Other students, when compelled to participate in a politically correct environment, might feel silenced even though the class was intended to “empower” them. Hence, whenever teachers practice an oppositional pedagogy, it can have the negative effect of confronting a student’s identity at its most vulnerable.

In the worst-case scenario, when we do not grant “respectful recognition to those identities that are most responsible for institutional, structural, and cultural violence” (e.g., the identities of “angry white males”), we run the risk of “perpetuating the (evil) Other’s traumatization, making him more rather than less likely to engage in cultural, structural, institutional, and even physical violence” (Bracher, 2006, p. 99). After all, few of us who practice critical pedagogies have managed to “express or engender sympathy for those individuals . . . who appear to be the most different from us” (p. 99) in our self-imagining as “humane, nonviolent” subjects. On the one hand, such “sympathy” may even require resources beyond the project of critical pedagogy, drawing on the literature of conflict transformation, a subject touched on in this volume but beyond the scope of this chapter. For learning to engage with individuals with whom we are in conflict is an important educational prospect and part of a translingual, transcultural pedagogy. On the other hand, Freirean models have also *staged* conflict as a way of enabling a pedagogical engagement with conflict, particularly in the “Theatre of the Oppressed” developed by Augusto Boal together with Freire and based on Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” Boal’s method is akin to “active learning” but seeks, by way of the theatrical context, to transform audiences into active participants in a psychologically-informed theatrical experience.

Faced with evidence that the problems teachers wish to solve are at least partially of their own making or of unwitting neglect, it becomes their task in (self-) critical pedagogy to reflect more carefully on their own motivations and knowledge. One must apprehend how students attempt to manipulate educators into repeating the relationships they feel to have been the most supportive in their past. Similar efforts should be engaged in by teachers—to apprehend how *they* have attempted to manipulate students into repeating relationships that the *educators* feel to have been the most supportive in their past—if we are to depart from pedagogical practices that we unconsciously presume maintain our identities in accustomed ways.

A more complete and effective self-analysis of teaching would require time and energy, not to mention insight, commitment, and critical, yet compassionate work. It further assumes that we are willing to reassess our personal identity investments in specific teaching practices. As a result, Bracher suggests that teachers reflect in writing on the question of what being a teacher means. Having teased out and acknowledged the identity needs involved in our initial decisions to be educators, we might then ask whether these still have the same significance for us. Have other core identity needs come to replace them in the meantime? In particular, our desire for recognition entails a basic psychoanalytic point about desire, namely, “that it is always desire of the other” (Bracher, 2006, p. 150). As reformulated by Bracher, the fundamental question for the educator becomes “Have I acted in conformity with the desire for the other’s well-being that is built into me?” (p. 151). Having then recognized such altruistic behavior as a core desire conveying a sense of gratification, “it tends to become a desire that we desire above others” (p. 151).

Toward Foreign Language Pedagogical Practice

Yet, how is all the preceding ultimately to be realized in practice? One of the warrants of Bracher’s approach is that studying fiction is well suited to the development of complex identity structures. As a result, teachers of rhetoric/composition and foreign languages would be well served to consider texts that provide optimal degrees of identity support for particular students taught in a particular class. By dealing with texts that engage readers through empathetic identification with characters, students can experience or enact the specific stage of emotional and cognitive development most required at a given point in their lives.⁵ As long as teachers offer students recognition, even conventional activities such as class discussions, group work, and journaling are capable of helping students cultivate more resilient selves.

Yet the precise forms which a psychologically informed pedagogy might take have to be decided on a case-by-case basis, in the situated contexts of the classroom. It is not that critical pedagogues are reluctant to give advice and tips on the bread and butter of conventional didactics. Rather, prescribing particular texts or assignments is a top-down tactic that may well backfire since an identity-centered pedagogy aims for students to find ways to recognize and integrate previously rejected parts of themselves. In moving beyond names, dates, and received interpretations, teachers of language/culture can take advantage of students’ interest in and enjoyment of popular fiction, song, film, or other media. If, however, English/foreign language educators choose only those texts *we* find particularly gratifying, we may fail to engage *students’* core identities. As a result, students will fall short when attempting to own other excluded elements of their selves.

One way to avoid such pitfalls is to carefully record students’ responses to their reading. Although English and foreign language/culture education conventionally

privilege essay writing and standard elements of style, having students emulate canonical forms may not address their specific identity needs. It is instead more effective for students to discuss and reflect on their own responses to certain texts and aspects of those texts (such as plot, theme, character, and style) in order to “investigate the identity needs motivating their consumptions of and responses to these elements” (Bracher, 2006, p. 182). This means that rather than having students offer an interpretation or judgment articulating what they think the *author* (or text or character or teacher) means, we redirect their attention back to their own responses, thereby assisting them to become more aware of their own identity contents and sociopsychological issues. This is not an anything-goes pedagogy where the teacher abdicates all responsibility for learning or conveying his or her expertise, nor is it purely self-referential; rather, it is multiply intertextual, including the student’s own “texts” (i.e., his or her own personal stories) as a foot in the door to connecting with texts as personal windows. These are windows on new cultures and new language, to be sure, but also windows on the student’s own self. Through such strategies, students can begin to recognize and take responsibility for their own development as individuals and members of collectives.

What kind of strategies might achieve these objectives? Bracher (2006) recommends working with “narratives that are powerful elicitors of sympathy” (p. 176), those that help students recognize and accept such feelings, once activated. He recommends *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Invisible Man*, and especially *Native Son* as heuristic ideals of narratives that effectively combine “the evocation of strong feelings of pity, sympathy, and compassion with exhortations to readers to cultivate these emotions” (p. 176). In addition, Bracher provocatively suggests that students “cultivate guilt” in response to narrative literature, thus “remov[ing] a major motive for denying their own responsibility and blaming the victims” (p. 191). In a class on American culture, the strategy of cultivating guilt would diminish “the psychological need for arguments, such as, ‘I don’t own slaves, and none of my ancestors ever did, so why should I sacrifice financially or professionally for the benefit of black people?’” (p. 191). In the foreign language (or translingual) classroom, these strategies can also be deployed with a range of texts that confront issues of racism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, or problematic historical events, such as the Holocaust and other genocides.

In my field of German studies, excellent materials and texts have become more “mainstream” in recent years. For example, the beginning German textbook *Deutsch zusammen* (Donahue & Watzinger-Tharp, 2000) now includes excerpts from *Schuldig geboren*, or *Born Guilty* (Sichrovsky, 1987, 1989), a well-known collection of first-person testimonies by the children of former Nazi leaders. Many teachers have adapted for instruction the novel *Der Vorleser*, or *The Reader* (Schlink, 1995, 1997), which addresses anti-Jewish racism in the Third Reich and the Holocaust as well as the guilt of “second-generation” non-Jews. The Jewish experience of the Holocaust is represented in a variety of texts, but a mainstream intermediate reader, *Mitlesen, Mitteilen* (Wells & Morewedge, 2004), has for some years included an excerpt from *Weiter leben*, or *Still Alive*, Ruth Klüger’s (1992, 2001) important memoir of surviving Auschwitz-Birkenau. Teachers who find these options too difficult for their students may consider the pedagogical

perennial *Damals war es Friedrich*, or *Friedrich* (Richter, 1961, 1987), the tragic story of two boys—one Jewish, the other non-Jewish—in the Nazi era. These are a few examples of how even very difficult subject matter can be brought into the classroom even at the introductory level, connecting students with new ways of seeing the new culture and themselves beyond the usual skills-based, communicative settings characteristic of many foreign language classes.

The failure of students (or teachers) to assume any form of “guilt” or to cultivate “sympathy” may threaten much more than individual identities. For Bracher, the continued existence of humanity depends on our acknowledging that our actions produce important consequences for other people. While critics will and should note the excesses of many psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners, from Lacan himself to Slavoj Žižek and others, numerous nonpsychoanalytic theorists of the self support Bracher’s premise that there is a basic human desire for recognition.

Supporting this prosocial identity work in the language classroom is admittedly challenging in a society that seems to value such qualities less than ever. Instead, characteristics such as wealth, social status, athletic ability, physical appearance, or racial/ethnic affiliation appear to be desired or enacted by many students over characteristics such as intellect, self-reflection, compassion, or altruism. Perhaps for these reasons, a pedagogy of the sort described here has hardly been attempted.⁶ But an identity-oriented critical pedagogy promoting prosocial identities for educators and learners aims to develop “a generativity in which our personal sense of self [as educators] is a function of our helping others to develop and flourish” (Bracher, 2006, p. 207). And the cognitive and emotional changes that this pedagogy aims to produce are a prerequisite for social and political changes.

Conclusion

In concluding, I would add that vigilance of an assertive kind is required as we continue to assess what is to be done about foreign language/culture education in the United States. For, as the MLA Report suggests, we who educate risk becoming too reasonable and diplomatic in the current environment. When faced, as of late, with accelerated reductions in state (and even private) support and expanded reliance on adjunct lecturers in the classroom, what would it mean especially for foreign language/culture educators to become less apologetic? Having already been compelled to compete for funding and recognition in an adversarial (and politicized) public sphere, we might consider the “added value” of challenging our critics more straightforwardly. Otherwise, we may never succeed in educating others to revise their information-processing scripts so that they might educate *themselves* about or at least respect and recognize the practice and theory of pedagogy. The models for such recognition proposed here do not just interrogate the idea of foreign language education as both “instrumentalist” and “constitutive” (MLA, 2007) but also challenge simplistic distinctions between theory and praxis. While remaining “realistic” and allowing for exigencies, foreign language/culture

educators ought to strive to retain their capacity to “relate and reflect” at the same time despite the current circumstances that tend to render critical pedagogy more difficult—yet no less necessary—to practice.

Notes

1. Cf. Graff’s (1992) classic statement of his position is in his *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992): “Academic institutions are already teaching the conflicts every time a student goes from one course or department to another. . . . Students typically experience a great clash of values, philosophies, and pedagogical methods among their various professors, but they are denied a view of the interactions and interrelations that give each subject meaning. . . . This is what has passed for ‘traditional’ education, but a curriculum that screens students from the controversies between texts and ideas serves the traditional goals of education . . . poorly” (p. 12).
2. For the importance of ethical reflection generally in instructed second-language acquisition, see Ortega’s (2005) relatively recent contribution.
3. For an early use of this term, see Huesmann (1988). Huesmann reasons that social behavior is controlled to a great extent by programs for behavior that are established during a person’s early development. These programs can be described as cognitive scripts stored in a person’s memory and are used as guides for behavior and social problem solving. Scripts persist in a child’s repertoire as they are rehearsed and enacted.
4. By “transferential,” Bracher is referring to the replication of another subject’s identity or the projection of an idealized identity (or “ego”) onto another person, such as a therapist or teacher. An example of such transference in teaching and learning is when students attempt to manipulate educators into repeating the relationships they feel to have been the most supportive in their past.
5. One anonymous reviewer of this chapter mentioned the Brechtian distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in noting that the Germanophone writing I recommend here seems non-Brechtian. Although the issue of identification and distancing in Brecht’s dramaturgy is highly complicated and although my own approach to critical pedagogy is poststructuralist (in the manner of “ecological” perspectives), I do indeed favor texts in language/culture pedagogy that elicit empathetic identification and character development.
6. To take the example of German language/culture, progressive educators might be overestimating our effectiveness if we object, as one anonymous reviewer of this chapter did, “What about all the courses where the students are moved from whatever ideas they have about Nazi Germany to understanding better why such a thing can happen?” In my experience, getting students to “other” themselves and adopt an inherently complex, critical stance to the catastrophe of the Holocaust—one that would promote tolerance, compassion, and perhaps even social change—involves a potentially painful learning process. The psychologically informed, identity-centered approach to critical pedagogy offers a way to explain the (unfortunate) persistence of Holocaust denial—to take but one example of historical revisionism.

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