

タイラス・トレス

Reading Reflecting 8 - Diversity and Inclusion of Sociopolitical Issues

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Japanese 320S: Upper Division Service Learning

Diversity and Inclusion of Sociopolitical issues in Foreign Language Classrooms

Foreign language education in classrooms can teach students invaluable cross-cultural ideologies, increase a student's first language comprehension, and allow for acceptance and understanding of foreign cultures. This study dives deeper, focusing on a language classrooms ability to discuss domestic diversity within a classroom and sociopolitical topics (Kubota, Austin, Saito-Abbott 2003). A key argument echoed from prior studies and analysis from Huber (1990), is that African-American students and teachers are under represented in the classroom. From this, it has appeared that foreign language education, in the american pedagogical system, is reserved for the "culturally and linguistically advantaged" (Ortega 1999). Because of the apparent lack of diversity in such classes, it could have an affect on a classroom's ability to discuss broader topics, as well as creating an environment for minority students not being interested in discussing broader topics.

Through a survey the researchers then determine if a student's experience with foreign language acquisition in a classroom has been able to do the following; relate to their own racial/ethnic background, connect new cultural ideas to their own, if a classroom has allowed for sociopolitical topics to be discussed, if the class is open to a diverse student body, and if their classes have been diverse (Kubota, Austin, Saito-Abbott 2003). When students were in the beginning course, many didn't feel a need to discuss broader topics of race, identity, gender, class, etc because they were focused on learning the language or uninterested in discussing such topics because they were not trying to learn about their own identity (Kubota, Austin, Saito-Abbott 2003). Sometimes minority students would even discuss how they felt as if they didn't belong, or would even put-down their familial culture or identity if they perceived it to be shameful. In regards to how a classroom can become more focused in a broader context of diversity and inclusion of sociopolitical issues, it is a tough situation for teachers to set the stage, if they push for these conversations, students may become more interested, however if a teacher doesn't facilitate it at all, it won't be discussed (Kubota, Austin, Saito-Abbott 2003).

After reading this article and going through the facilitation in class, I think this study is very enlightening to the current situation in American classrooms, and should be further analyzed to better understand the environment of foreign language education and even reframe the pedagogical system that promotes language acquisition as something for the linguistically advantaged.