

**Language Study: A necessary part of the internationalized curriculum!**

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## **Abstract**

In an urgent effort to internationalize curricula, institutions of higher education are rethinking the role of language study. Many administrators, faculty and staff are realizing that language study is more than merely a means of communication. More importantly, it is the key to understanding how people from diverse cultural backgrounds, especially those who are engaged in our academic institutions, interpret their cultural experiences. Three important questions will be discussed in this paper: 1) If we accept the idea that curriculum reforms should mirror the changing world, then what curricular changes are needed to promote internationalization?, 2) What role does language study play in this reformed curriculum?, and 3) If we accept a new definition of knowledge as having a cultural component, then how can we better prepare our students to gain multicultural competence?

## Introduction

The *internationalized curriculum* is the *phrase du jour*. Indeed, there is no debate on the need for an *internationalized curriculum*, but agreeing on what this curricular reform includes is a different matter. Bond (2006), in discussing curricular reform chooses to use the term *emerging curriculum* to describe the curricular changes taking place in academia. She asserts that in the emerging curriculum, knowledge is a cultural construction and as such, offers context-based understandings of the world in which knowledge is subjective and the researcher is a participant in the creation of knowledge. The emerging curriculum is contrasted with the *established curriculum*, in which knowledge is universal and superior because it is based on objectivity, truth, and rationality. She posits that *internationalization* involves *prior understanding* in that it requires the addition of “an international dimension to all aspects of the educational experience”; whereas internationalizing the curriculum involves emerging understanding, which includes “...substantive knowledge about [the] socio-cultural context of other societies, alteration in how one responds to cultural differences, how one behaves in intercultural circumstances, and how one becomes self aware and maintains one’s own cultural identity while understanding and working with others” (n.p.). This definition of the emerging curriculum is much more complex, and depicts a world which is more ethnically diverse, multicultural as well as multilingual.

In the 2004 *Report of the NASULGC Task Force on International Education* (the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges), Russo and Osborne delineate five characteristics of a globally competent student: “1) S/he has a diverse and knowledgeable world view, 2) comprehends international dimensions of his/her major field of study, 3) communicates effectively in another language and/or cross-culturally, 4) exhibits cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability, and 5) carries global competencies throughout life” (p. 1). The authors of this report acknowledge that achieving cross-cultural communication competency in another language may be very challenging because of the lack of emphasis on language study and the decreasing number of courses being offered. This lack of attention to language study outside of one’s first language needs to be addressed if we want our students to become multicultural, engaged citizens.

The questions that arise from this discussion are: 1) If we accept the idea that the curriculum needs to change to mirror the changing world, then what curricular reforms are necessary to carry it out? 2) What role does language study play in this reformed curriculum? And finally, 3) As Bond contends, if we accept that in the emerging curriculum knowledge has a cultural component, and, as Russo and Osborne point out, that language study is being neglected, then how can we prepare our students to gain multicultural competence?

## I. Language Study and the Internationalized Curriculum: An *Emerging* Paradigm

“We expend almost all of our national resources for foreign language learning on first-time, low-level learning among high school and college students, then watch those minimal skills decay and disappear through lack of use or reinforcement “ (Lambert, 1991, in Straight, 1998, p. 1). Only students who major in language or related fields develop bilingual skills and multicultural awareness to meet the current professional requirements of a globalized world; that is one of the reasons why the United States lags in multilingual language proficiency needed to function effectively in cross-cultural environments (American Council on Education, 1989).

College students are not reaching this goal of multilingualism and multiculturalism because educational institutions and academic departments do not support the study of language and culture. Byrne (2006) criticizes foreign language departments as being academically and structurally bifurcated. She adds that they are often divided into *language* and *content* categories. This bifurcation manifests itself in mutually exclusive classes such as *language* vs. *literature* classes, *lower-division* vs. *upper-division*, and *practical* vs. *intellectual* classes (Byrne, 2002; Carter, 2002; Kramersch, Howell, Wellmon, & Warner, 2007; Maxim, 2009; Seidl, 1998; Walther, 2007 & 2009, as cited in Warner, 2011). “If language is taught as the mastery of a skill rather than an ongoing struggle to participate in dynamic, socially-constructed systems of semiotics, then it has nothing to do with critical thinking and, furthermore, the intellectual inquiry that characterizes many upper-division literature and culture courses has little to do with practical language abilities” (Lambert, 1989, p. 15).

The acquisition of practical language abilities has characterized language study offered at the beginning and intermediate levels since the 1980s. This concept of *communicative competence* emphasizes the acquisition of oral communication skills in generic contexts as the basis of beginning and intermediate language study (Swaffar, 2006). Communicative competence is based on the notion that using real-world texts, in contrast to texts composed for pedagogical purposes, encourages the development of more *authentic* communication. The goal of this competence is to help the learner better understand native-speaker environments (Kramersch, 1993), and focuses on student recall of information rather than critical analysis of that information (Swaffar, 2006).

Byrnes (2006) asserts that this emphasis on oral communication “...[creates] conceptual and practical ceiling effects that need to be addressed” (p. 574). Without content and analytical thinking as part of the curriculum of language study, language competence remains only self-referential (Swaffar, 2006). This criticism of communicative competence also points to the need for language study to widen its focus from the knowledge of grammar rules and the ability to translate, to the “ability to respond and adapt to new meanings and new contexts” (Warner, 2011, p. 7). Language departments must be poised to equip students to attune students to “the multi-voiced and dialogized discourse that characterizes the production and distribution of knowledge in a globalized information society” (Hansen, 2004, p. 124). Globalization requires critical analysis and the ability to

choose from a multiplicity of meanings; language study needs to espouse broader objectives in its effort to internationalize the curriculum, including focusing on the ambiguities of language and the symbolic dimensions of meaning, which the communicative competence school of thought has ignored (Warner, 2011).

These broader objectives of language study must include the theoretical construct of *intercultural competence*. This construct is exceptionally difficult to define even though many have tried (see Deardorff, 2006, p. 242). Despite the difficulty of agreeing on an exact definition, there is no argument about the theoretical importance of cross-cultural education. As mentioned earlier, language education must go further than having communicative competence as its sole objective, which is incomplete and insufficient in helping develop individuals who are both linguistically and inter-culturally fluent. Therefore, in addition to the ability to adjust to different speech contexts, there is the need to adapt to different cultural contexts. "An educational philosophy that stresses only doing things with words runs the risk of helping maintain the status quo; it has difficulty dealing with the teaching of culture, because cross-cultural competence, unlike pragmatic competence, is predicated on paradox and conflict and often irreducible ways of viewing the world..." (Kramsch, 1993, p. 240).

Language study must equip an individual to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds in various social settings. Kramsch (1993) describes the complete language curriculum as *critical language pedagogy* and includes in it the following aspects: 1) *awareness of global context*, 2) *local knowledge* (defined by Ellis (1992) as a classroom in which many kinds of learning opportunities are provided though the communication that happens between individuals), 3) *ability to listen*, 4) *metatalk* (communicative approaches to language teaching have focused on *learning language by doing*, emphasized in more recent communicative approaches, rather than by *talking about learning language*, emphasized in the older structural pedagogies), 5) *making do with words* (rather than doing things with words, thereby limiting speech acts, which is the reality of the language classroom), 6) *autonomy and control* (encouraging the individual to exercise both compliance and rebellion), and 7) *the long haul* ("Rather than ask at the end of the school year, 'What will my students remember from all that I have taught them?',...ask 'What will be worth remembering among the many things my students have learned?'" , p. 247).

The language curriculum must therefore broaden its scope and include learning objectives to address all the domains of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). To do this, both oral proficiency, traditionally the focus of lower-level language classes and literary proficiency, traditionally the focus of upper level language and literature classes, must be united to create a well-rounded course of study that will better prepare the student for study and travel abroad or the workplace that will require these abilities.

## **II. Language Study and Curricular Reform: *An Engaged Paradigm***

If we accept the idea that curriculum reforms should mirror the changing world, then what curricular changes are needed to promote internationalization?

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Concerning Language Study: “*Donde termina la gramática empieza la creatividad, el arte.*”  
Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946, Dominican philologist and literary critic).

Despite today’s budgetary concerns that afflict many if not all institutions of higher learning, it is with great urgency that language study –now more than ever—be considered a shared responsibility, one that can be of invaluable impact across the disciplines.

For decades, many of our educational institutions have been stuck in the traditional trenches of foreign language study. The customary two-year language requirement programs, comprised of large classes with 30 or more students, are not only insufficient but also counterproductive. At best, this approach may lead to learning some vocabulary, minimal grammar lessons and limited sentence structures at the novice or intermediate low oral proficiency levels, if guided by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) rubrics. After fulfilling a mostly imposed institutional language requirement, many students exit these language courses without a sense linguistic direction or integration of disciplines. Departments and programs from other disciplines tend to view language study as a service either to the general studies area or an additional academic prerequisite to a specific major (upping the ante, especially in popular majors). Rarely do students who fulfill language requirements actually apply their limited language skills to their specific fields of interest.

Institutions committed to internationalization are now desperately seeking multiple meaningful pathways which link language study to the student’s declared major and/or minor disciplines of study. An integrative, multidisciplinary focus will lead to more practical incentives for students to pursue advanced language study, if it is in some way intimately connected to their fields of interest. The ultimate goal would be to create a new language-learning paradigm, one that differs from the traditional language requirement or foreign language major option of instruction. An approach that is distributed across the curriculum will, in fact, actively engage students in continuous language study. It enhances contextualization and multicultural perspectives. This shared venue will enable institutions of higher learning to convey a more positive message to the diverse communities it serves by envisioning the following formats: 1) through collaborative multidisciplinary projects, officially link languages and cultures to the varied disciplines of study; and 2) recognize the immediate needs of the growing number of multicultural, multilingual communities...hence, our changing world.

Most urban as well as suburban learning and service environments are culturally affected by multilingualism. In our neighboring communities, a distinctive plurality of charged, intergenerational voices is always within ear’s reach. These voices exude intrinsic freedom, pride, vitality, and respect of cultural identities. They coexist in our communities, in our workplaces, in our schools. Their presence is heard and felt in every discipline; in all manners and means of communication; in all realms of life: living-learning student centers; traditional, hybrid or online classroom settings and social networking via cyberspace. Dr. Lorena Terando, an associate professor of the French Graduate Program in Translation at

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the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, established an online graduate academic program that highlights the following: “Many students majoring or minoring in foreign language are not sure of all career options available to them. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook estimates that ‘...employment of interpreters and translators is projected to increase 24 percent over the 2006-16 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations” (<http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/mallt/index.cfm>). This demand is a direct result of broadening international ties and increased foreign language speakers in the United States.

Languages, just as autonomous nations, yearn for cross-cultural affiliations and international connections. It is one of the primary reasons that languages, either through urgent translations, simultaneous interpretations or transcriptions, remain actively imbedded across the professional, sociopolitical disciplines, in times of peace and in times of war. Translation projects are interdisciplinary. Collaborative initiatives in multidisciplinary areas can reenergize and fuse course work throughout the curriculum: Business Studies, Allied Health and Hospitality industries; in Languages, Social Work, Writing Across the Disciplines; in Computer Technology Programs, Linguistics, Comparative Literature. And as for graduate studies, these joint, valuable academic efforts can form an integral part of the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey’s Master in Arts in American Studies (MAAS); the Master’s Degrees in Social Work, in Art Education, and Instructional Technology as well as the Doctoral Degree in Physical Therapy. A small public Distinctive Liberal Arts College in rural Southern New Jersey can be viewed as a microcosm of impact in the region if not the nation, one that embraces language study. Establishing partnerships with the local high schools and awarding college credit in language study to prospective college applicants is an admirable incentive. Working with high school World Language educators can align our pedagogy with theirs; it reinforces the professional educational standards and assessment of student outcomes. Growth in language study today is as vital and significant as expanding the college’s physical appearance in a time of economic recession.

The more languages we acquire, the more we grow; the more we come to understand other ways of life, other ways of being. International diplomacy can effectively promote cultural understanding. Diplomacy, though, must be viewed as multilingual, creative, constructive and harmonious. Educational, interdisciplinary partnerships at all levels of instruction--including intergovernmental initiatives and trade—must acclimate as well, using ways marked by tact and sensitivity in all that pertains to social relations.

Most emigrants ---those who leave one country to settle in another--- manage to excel in the acculturation process without ever attempting to make sense of formal, traditional language study. In fact, many students who come here from other nations arrive without the sole intention of acquiring native fluency in English. Visiting students as well as emigrants, who begin forging a life in this nation away from their homelands, use English as the primary vehicle. Their willingness to adopt other languages actually helps them to expand, develop their passionate interests in diverse professional or non-professional spheres. Their fluency in English language communication skills is determined by their

development, relevance and engagement within their professions and communities. As much as language educators aspire to simulate, portray real life experiences in the classroom, the traditional modes of instruction often impede continuous, ongoing sustained communication. The academic, grammar based classroom format is usually passive unlike the varied settings in diverse communities and cultures. The comparisons and connections are limited, even if the theoretical, pedagogical and philosophical intent of the five Cs (Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) “...envisions a future in ALL students will develop and maintain in English and at least one other language, modern or classical” (National Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 1996). If this goal is to be accomplished, then it is vital to vigorously focus on other related fields of study, interest and concern. People from all walks of life, no matter where they make a living, must share, bind and expand linguistic proficiencies beyond the grammatical approach.

### **Curricular reform and the changing world: Redefining language courses**

For decades, many students have been taught to interpret language study based on courses clustered into vague generalizations. They are often solely identified by vertical levels with titles such as *introductory, basic, beginning, intermediate and advanced*. These classes are also ranked according to numerical levels from low 1000 to high 4000 levels, in supposed ascending degrees of difficulty. Most levels are associated with repeated patterns of instruction, reverting back to grammar, middle, intermediate and high school. Upon entering college, the classroom language experience seldom represents change. It mostly becomes a repetitive “language study” experience, one which too many students begrudgingly accept. Students appear to be convinced that they will “get through” memorizing vocabulary, verb conjugations and “working from the text and workbooks.” Attempting to break this engrained, indisputable, curricular academic culture is nearly impossible. Language professors who are set in their ways resist change; and students, because of this unquestioned culture of language acquisition, also resist change.

At the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, it has taken at least 10 years to replace, restructure, reorganize and review what is normally called *intermediate level* Spanish I and II at the 2000 level. And still it has been difficult to persuade many ---students, faculty, staff and even administrators--- in the college community that all people who speak Spanish are not Spanish (from Spain). Many can’t differentiate the meanings of such highly charged social terms as Latin (Latino/a), Hispanic, and Spanish. So, one summer day, about five years ago, an instructor and a tenured member of the faculty decided to offer summer courses entitled Mapping Hispanic Cultures I and II as opposed to Intermediate Spanish I and II. The old- school intermediate text was dropped. A new text, *Mundo 21*, was adopted. It emphasized language study based on geography, demographics, cultures, literatures and grammar. A couple of years earlier, with the incentive of offering some practical choices for disgruntled students having to fulfill language requirements, additional intermediate level courses evolved: *Reading Knowledge of Spanish I and II*; and *Spanish for the Human Services Professions*. The latter is taught by a professor of Social Work. Integration of disciplines and collaborative learning opportunities are currently primary missions of the Languages

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and Culture Studies Program- LANG (previously known as the Romance and Classical Languages and Literatures- ROML).

Several innovative offerings have also evolved, promoting vigorous language study within the Language Program, particularly in Spanish: Oral Proficiency Methodology in Spanish, a workshop with emphasis on preparing students to take ACTFL's Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI); Contrastive Analysis of English and Spanish Grammar; Introduction to Literary Translation; Children's Literature in Spanish; Applied Linguistics in Spanish; and Advanced Oral/Written Composition/Syntax in Spanish, among others.

These courses, in addition to actively engaged, committed, interdisciplinary collaborations among faculty, have caused a spike in the number of students from other disciplines to declare Spanish as a minor concentration. When coupled with record-breaking numbers of students willing to study abroad, surely there exists a vibrant, positive resonance, a keen interest in language study beyond the novice levels.

### **New Meanings/Contexts: Linking Minor Concentrations and Graduate Programs to Language Study**

Gone are the days when language departments would have to justify tenure track positions contingent on enrollment. Undergraduate student interest, based on high numbers of students majoring in language areas, would customarily lay the groundwork to petition and compete for - additional tenure-track lines. If every language department/program in the nation would have to rely on that justification process which, more often than not, is tied to institutional language requirements of a minimum two-year language study, then most language programs would be extremely limited---especially in traditional advanced course offerings. There would be little if no hope for growth in expanding language departments because there are so few students declaring majors in any given language. This has prompted some institutions to simply disband their language departments, since they can no longer produce revenue to justify their existence. These unilateral, arbitrary, administrative decisions based on extreme budgetary hardship also reflect a lack of discernment or long-range perspectives in thinking or planning. It's a crass, myopic quick fix, one that is lacking in professional discrimination, intellectual sensibility and ethics.

Today, linguistic specialists are urgently housed---even in corporate environments--- and intimately adjoined to other disciplines and developing graduate study programs. Languages--- if viewed as forming an integral link--- can enhance the curriculum in a manner very different from the traditional, academic language-learning model. Identifying key minor concentrations with large numbers of declared minors is a viable option, one which favors a different, more practical focus on language acquisition. A serious concern for language study is undeniably necessary, if one is to be competent and remain current in the development of related fields. Consider the following short list of the following research areas: Latin American Studies, International Business; Hospitality; Criminal Justice; World Health Organizations; International Studies; Economics; Finance; History;

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Investment Banking, Marketing Analysis; Foreign Service; Politics, International Law, Medicine, Engineering and Instructional Technology, among many others.

Graduate programs, especially those that vie for international recognition, must recruit multilingual, multicultural individuals who can represent the programs well in international arenas. Graduate studies faculty must be equally competent, able to work, do research, using more than just one language. It is in today's world, especially in the current job market, an advantage for individuals to not only have studied abroad but to have lived abroad for extended periods. Cultural sensitivity and the acculturation process are just as important as having a command in any given discipline. Professionals must always adapt, and adhere to an ever changing, pluralistic world.

Our institutions of higher learning must do the same, offering students as many incentives as possible to pursue, attain the highest degrees of diversified proficiencies in language study. The linguistic linkages, if spread throughout the disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate levels of instruction will invigorate the disciplines and open career opportunities for students.

### ***Some Questions for Consideration:***

- Can we envision a graduate program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies without German?
- Is it possible to graduate students in International Business without Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, among other languages which represent giant emerging economies?
- How valuable is a master's degree in American Studies without any linguistic concern for the Indigenous populations in the Americas?
- In a pluralistic society, should our schools of education continue to graduate monolingual educators?
- Why must our medical professionals lack the communication skills and cultural sensitivities as they attempt to heal others?
- Do our ambassadors in the international arena have a command of other languages?

### **III. Practical Applications: Preparing students with an *International Outlook***

If our institutions are to become globally competent, foreign language preparation must extend beyond students matriculating in our departments of foreign languages and literature. Today's global challenges require foreign language competency for graduates in the social and natural sciences and in our professional schools. Too often at our institutions, the primary responsibility for foreign language preparation falls upon faculty in language and literature departments who have limited interest and few resources to teach foreign languages relevant to students who plan to major in disciplines other than their own (Brustein, 2007, p. 390).

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Preparing today's students with an international outlook requires the collaboration of faculty and administration in all disciplines across the curriculum. Below are some specific suggestions for institutions to realize this goal:

- Basic language and cultural study courses need to be fused to further enhance internationalization efforts within the curriculum.
- Colleges/universities should consider an intercultural literacy minor/concentration.
- Deans, department chairs and administrators and staff should be included in the discussion of educational initiatives that would strengthen, motivate language study
- Offices of International Student Services should encourage students to study abroad and make this information easily available to students. Students who desire to travel abroad should be engaged in language and culture studies in order to fully make the most of their study abroad experience
- Students, administrators, faculty and staff who command fluency in other languages should become valuable resources for multicultural projects and interdisciplinary program activities.
- College credit should be awarded to prospective students entering Stockton with competent language proficiency acquired (including English as a Second Language) at their respective high schools or at other educational institutions of higher learning (transfer students). These students will be motivated to register in upper level language and culture courses.
- Service learning projects such as tutoring languages, helping arrange cultural programs, exhibits, community projects, etc. should be made available to students
- All students should be encouraged to become more involved in international living and learning communities, international events such as performances, lectures, etc. These opportunities should be advertised across campus.

Regardless of academic discipline, all departments and professors would do well to establish closer relationships with colleagues across their entire campus and inform themselves about who those colleagues are and what they are teaching, researching and thinking (Gehlhar, 2009). This collaboration is necessary to foster the imperative goal of our institutions: preparing students with an international outlook.

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