



Intercultural Literacy: Storytelling, Language and Identity

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Abstract

Driven by an earnest commitment to understand the world from a myriad of perspectives, and aware of how essential language is in defining identity and bonding across differences, I developed a workshop-based project for language learners and future language educators titled Intercultural Literacy: Storytelling, Language and Identity, intended to foster global awareness, language proficiency, cultural competence and civic engagement with the city as framework. Examining the city as a social entity allowed students to reflect on and discuss the cultural characteristics of urban settings, what they reveal about the human interactions, and the human cultures they reflect. Intercultural Literacy: Storytelling, Language and Identity has been implemented in a variety of educational settings in Latin America, Russia and United States of America. The project supports students in adopting a critical reflection on what constitutes a culture, how identity is constructed across cultures, what cultural variables influence behavior and shape relationships, and what role community plays in defining culture. Students also examine their beliefs about language and language use -how language impacts the construction of the self-, and they reflect on how their own sociocultural identity affects speech interactions in which they are involved. Throughout the project students deepen their understanding of what it means to be interculturally literate, of the competencies required to `read' sensitively a second culture, to interpret its symbols and negotiate its meanings. The project adopts storytelling as framework to communication that respects heritage and honors identities. Adichie (2013) argues that inherent in the power of stories, is a danger—the danger of only knowing one story about a group. “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” Storytelling has the potential to explore new self-perceptions and combat negative cultural constructions. Inspired by Jane Addams’ philosophy of education and her ideas of building democratic learning communities (1910), my interdisciplinary and engaged pedagogy in global studies, foreign languages and urban teaching is defined by my relentless commitment to creating opportunities that foster our understanding of intercultural matters, while at the same time providing meaningful support to participate responsibly, creatively and passionately in society. Living in a multicultural society allows learners and instructors to identify local communities where students can collaborate in projects with individuals of international backgrounds. The Intercultural Literacy: Storytelling, Language and Identity incorporates a community engagement component that supports students in developing a more comprehensive knowledge of the cultures present in the city, in understanding sociolinguistic patterns as well as value systems different from their own, and enabling to make meaningful connections and developing relationships with their city neighbors –understand city dynamic and invisible borders.

Keywords: *community engagement, language empowerment, intercultural literacy, language and identity, storytelling.*

References:

- [1] Addams, J. (1910) Twenty Years at Hull-House
- [2] Adichie, C. (2013) The Danger of A Single Story