Social Justice in the Language Classroom: A Call to Action

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Abstract

The goals of language education in the United States have always been informed by the social, historical, and political contexts in which the instruction takes place. In this paper, we make the case for social justice education in all language classrooms, and we explore the different threads of scholarship that inform social justice in language education. We begin with the Communities and Cultures standards, and then discuss critical pedagogy and transformative learning. Avenues and opportunities are explored for effective social justice instruction at the lesson planning and course design level, and for professional development. This paper concludes with a call to action for all language teachers.

Key Words: *Social Justice, Critical Pedagogy, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Transformative Learning, World-Readiness Standards*

Background

The goals of language education in the United States have always been informed by the social, historical, and political contexts in which the instruction takes place. These contexts have influenced methodologies (from grammar-translation to proficiency-based approaches) as well as language offerings (from classical language curricula to modern world and community language curricula) with specific languages experiencing varying degrees of popularity throughout history. Although functional proficiency in the target language is often touted as a goal of language programs and an expectation for students, the structure of language programs in the US has never been ideal for fostering such fluency; many students do not begin language study until mid to late adolescence and will not achieve the amount of contact hours necessary to become proficient in the language of study (Johnson, 2015).

Many researchers (e.g., Johnson & Randolph, 2015; Leeman, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2010; Osborn, 2006) have challenged the idea of a purely practical, proficiency-based language classroom and have called upon language educators to take a more critical approach to curriculum development that recognizes the political nature of language study. In fact, the current political climate of our nation is often dominated by questions of immigration, diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and globalism—all issues that relate to and are informed by language and language study.

The recently released "Framework for Developing Global and Cultural Competencies to Advance Equity, Excellence and Economic Competitiveness" (U.S. Department of Education International Affairs Office, 2017) is a testament to the high urgency of such issues.

Generally, social justice can be defined as the equitable sharing of social power and benefits within a society (Osborn, 2006). In the context of language education, this would include the curricular elements as well as the instructional choices implemented to aid in that endeavor. Although social justice has emerged in the last decade as a popular line of inquiry in language pedagogy scholarship, the foundations for social justice education have been present for much longer. For decades, researchers have been concerned about the superficial treatment of culture in world language curriculum development and instruction and have called for more critical approaches (Garrett-Rucks, 2016; Koning, 2010; Kubota, 2008; Nieto, 2002; Tedick & Walker, 1994; Weinberg, 1982). Although social justice education is compatible with the world language curriculum and can be rewarding, it is also challenging and intentional work. Incorporating this type of pedagogy requires the critical deconstruction of various political, institutional, and linguistic power structures that exist as well as their explicit and implicit influences in the organization and operation of schools and in the development of curriculum. Faculty have long been teaching students to see the world from divergent points of view and to reevaluate their worldview based on their new understanding of other languages, cultures, and communities. The next steps for teachers and researchers involve operationalizing the factors, developing strategies and materials, and sharing successes with an eye towards replicability and scalability. Because the foundation for social justice in language education has already been laid, the current community of teachers and scholars must continue to build on that foundation with original research that furthers our understanding of how to take critical approaches to social justice in the world language classroom.

Given that the world language curriculum is already quite overloaded, many language teachers may wonder why and how social justice themes should be incorporated into their classrooms. For nearly two decades, the world language curriculum has been guided by the Five C's: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Cultures. Given the broad nature of these curricular goals, a teacher could spend an entire language course focusing solely on the development of students' language proficiency and performance (the Communication standard) while neglecting the other standards. This is a common and understandable approach, because it is challenging enough to develop students' skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes within the confines of a traditional classroom model. The challenge is exasperated with the added responsibility of incorporating the other C's of the curriculum and, beyond that, the addition of a social justice element. No matter how important those curricular elements may be, it is indeed impractical to incorporate each of them into everyday instruction in an isolated fashion. Teachers must be intentional and resourceful about the way they integrate these skills and capitalize upon the potential for interconnectivity that each element offers. It is our argument that social justice concepts support language proficiency goals as well as all five of the C's from the *World-Readiness Standards* (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015), and

that social justice can be pursued at all levels of the world language curriculum. In fact, social justice can be the thread that ties together the other curricular elements.

As language, culture, and community are inextricably connected, the language education classroom provides the ideal context for entering critical, transformative spaces of culture and community study informed by a social justice framework. Moreover, this critical approach to language study complements the curricular goals as outlined by the *World-Readiness Standards* (2015) and supports the development of students' language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence at all levels. ACTFL's (2016) most recent statement on the value of language study for diversity and unity further underscores the importance of learning to communicate with each other in ways that foster the collaboration and creativity necessary to address real social problems. The statement asserts that "diversity and intercultural competence are qualities that must be embraced in the US and throughout the world" (paragraph 1).

In this paper, we make the case for social justice education in the world language classroom for all learners, and we explore the different threads of scholarship that inform social justice in language education beginning with the Communities and Cultures standards for connections to social justice education. We then demonstrate that scholarship in critical pedagogy and transformative learning in language education is already setting the stage for social justice as a unifying principle. We conclude by suggesting avenues and opportunities for effective social justice instruction at the lesson planning level, the course design level, and for language teacher development.

Social Justice in Language Education

In a webinar (Randolph & Johnson, 2016) through the ACTFL Teaching and Learning of Culture Special Interest Group in June 2016, we asked participants what they associated with the term social justice. They gave answers such as equity, sharing of power, response to biases, fairness, reconciliation, self-reflection, empowerment, community, and critique of whiteness. These answers suggest that social justice is a subjective term that takes on different meanings in various contexts. As authors, this presents us with a dilemma—we want to avoid an objective, prescribed definition of social justice, but at the same time we recognize that we cannot speak critically of social justice education without some sense of common reference about what exactly the term entails. With those constraints and goals in mind, we have developed a framework for understanding how topics of social justice fit into the broader context of world language education.

For the purposes of this essay, we imagine the scope of social justice to include any aspect of the language classroom through which participants (students, teachers, and other stakeholders) come to a greater understanding of or make progress towards equity in society. Social justice is related to at least four other themes that have emerged in the current generation of world language education: critical pedagogy, intercultural competence, transformative learning, and community-based learning. In order to engage in social justice in the classroom, students need to develop their intercultural communicative competence, which is often a transformative learning process that fundamentally alters the way students interact with the world. As teach-

ers, we employ critical pedagogy in the classroom and, as a result of a social justice emphasis, are able to effectively engage in community-based learning.
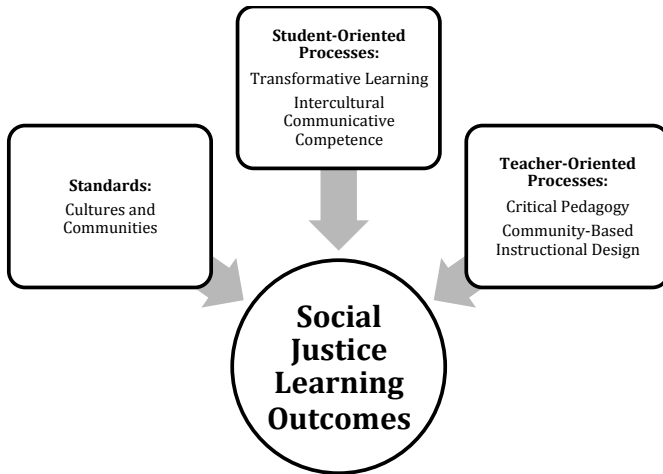

Figure 1. Elements of Social Justice in World Language Education

Cultures and Communities

When teachers' pedagogical choices and learners' experiences are all organized around a critically conscious view of the World-Readiness Standards' sections on Cultures and Communities, our classrooms become sites of social justice work. Below, we explore each of these elements in more detail.

Community-based learning. A community, at the most basic level, can be defined as a group of individuals that, to some degree, have shared experiences. When we ask students to study another culture, we are asking them to enter into a community that is not their own, make sense of new experiences, and build relationships. In some classrooms, community engagement is limited to the virtual or hypothetical. In others, students travel, do service learning, or in other ways experience actual contact with communities. Although it is often largely ignored by language educators because of the logistical difficulties it entails, the Communities standard is a high priority for language learners (Magnan, 2014).

When students engage in this kind of community-based learning, we cannot ignore historical and current injustices forced upon those communities. It is undoubtedly more comfortable and less controversial to interact with communities as *tourists* (Byram, 1997) benefitting from privileged positions without acknowledging the realities of race, class, power, and oppression. However, students cannot effectively engage with the communities about which they learn without also understanding the social, historical, economic, and political interactions between their own communities and the target communities. Through community-based learning, students should come to understand that entering into authentic relationships with people from another community requires getting to know people as individuals and not as representatives of a community, while also acknowledging the common reali-

ties experienced by members of that community.

Community engagement, when done well, can be an enlightening or even disorienting experience for students. It can also lead students to develop empathy and courage, building relationships across difference and participating in community activism both in their own and other communities. Students may come to understand the truth in the famous Lilla Watson quote, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

In the current social and political climate in which our language classrooms are situated, the need is clear for students to be able to communicate, not only in the most efficient way possible, but also in ways that set the stage for relationship building and problem solving. Problems stemming from economic and social inequity affect all of our communities at a local and a global scale. We cannot hope to teach students to engage in intercultural communication without also imparting awareness of the inequities that exist between and within communities. We assert that, in order to teach language proficiency to our students, we must also teach them to see the world from the perspectives of diverse communities.

Any discussion of the so-called "target" community leads us to ask, where is the target community? When we talk about speakers of the target language, are they members of our own communities? Or are they a far-away hypothetical? In many classrooms, students are exposed to a version of the target community that is not only far away, but is also represented as an idealized "native speaker". For French students, this may mean focusing on France to the exclusion of other Francophone communities, even communities of French speakers here in the United States. For Spanish students, community engagement may involve interacting with people in their own neighborhood as representatives of an exotic foreign culture, rather than as members of their own local community. For students of other languages such as Japanese or Arabic, to name just a couple, students need not imagine a static, idealized native speaker in order to learn about communities. The United States includes communities from these target language groups and is home to many speakers of those languages. The term *community language* (see Menacker, 2001) is used in the UK to describe languages that are represented domestically as opposed to the terms most commonly used in the US: foreign or world languages, both of which emphasize the languages' outsider status.

Additionally, in classrooms where we explore languages whose speakers have affected the historical and political realities of the United States, another view of community comes to bear. If we let go of the one-dimensional ideal of community, then we can help students acquire a long view of history and effectively analyze how their own community's story has become intertwined with the stories of others. Teaching history in the target language can be challenging and can result in superficial, isolated vignettes from history. Teaching the same history from the perspective of community contact allows students to cultivate accurate perceptions of how U.S. policy, culture, and language have impacted communities both domestically and abroad, for better or worse.

In Menacker (2001), the benefits of engaging with real communities are described as a "trade-off" (p. 2) between the carefully controlled input that is char-

acteristic of a classroom environment and the exposure to authentic language and variation that is characteristic of community-based language learning. Menacker goes on to suggest that, in order to learn language that will prove useful in community settings, students should develop listening skills, capacity for real-world interaction, investment in the local community, and language awareness, just to name a few. Students who are well-prepared to grapple with the social realities of the community and partner with community members in pursuit of social good are characterized by a) an ability to truly listen and communicate with speakers of authentic varieties of language, b) investment in those communities, and c) an awareness of language use and function. Also, such students become more astute observers of communities in general and therefore more able to pursue social good in their own local context, even if that context is separate from the target community.

Intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) can be understood as the ability to understand cultures other than one's own and to use that understanding to communicate effectively. Byram (1997) outlines five objectives of ICC. The first four are attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction. The fifth objective—critical cultural awareness/political education—falls squarely into the social justice arena. This objective involves examining the practices, products, and perspectives of one's own culture and the culture of others through a critically conscious lens. This critical consciousness can be achieved by examining power and access and recognizing that language is a political act, especially as these concepts relate to a language learner's interactions with native speakers (Byram & Risager, 1999). A focus on so-called "native speakers" and "native cultures"[1] has made ICC an ideal framework for organizing study abroad experiences (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Shiri, 2015); however, there is also a focus on ICC and its practical application in the domestic world language classroom (Moeller & Fatlin Osborn, 2014). Given that ICC focuses on linking communication and culture in meaningful and critical ways, ICC is probably the component that links social justice education most directly to what has long been the dominant goal of most language courses—the goal of language competence.

In the teaching and learning of ICC, access to authentic texts—texts written by members of a culture for members of that culture—is of great importance because they provide evidence of the culture in its most robust form. It is through these resources that learners have the opportunity to come into contact with and thus to analyze other cultures. Inauthentic resources developed for the language learner prioritize language over culture (Moeller & Fatlin Osborn, 2014). If language acquisition is the only goal of language instruction, such constructed texts serve a clear purpose. However, if language education is about accessing other cultures through language and expanding learners' views, then authentic texts provide essential opportunities for language and culture learning.

The World-Readiness Standards. Any discussion of community-based learning and intercultural communicative competence must connect with the Cultures and Communities standards. Although social justice is not explicitly mentioned as one of the goals of the World-Readiness Standards, the current standards do take a more critical and nuanced approach to the conceptualization of such notions of "cultures" and "communities" when compared to the previous national standards docu-

ment. Table 1 shows how the language for the Cultures and Communities standards has been updated from 2006 to 2015.

It is clear from this comparison that the World-Readiness Standards move away from a knowledge-based understanding of cultures and communities and focus more on such skills as interaction, reflection, and collaboration. The phrase "cultural competence" emphasizes the ability to work within different cultural contexts. With that in mind, social justice education is a powerful vehicle to move students toward a deeper, more critical understanding of the notions of cultures and communities so that they become individuals who can communicate and interact with that high level of cultural competence that the standards promote.

Table 1

Evolution of the Cultures and Communities Standards

Standards for Foreign Language Learning (2006)	World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015)
Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures. • Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied. • Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.	Interact with cultural competence and understanding. • Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied. • Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.
Participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world. • Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting. • Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for both personal enjoyment and enrichment.	Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world. • Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world. • Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement.

Another element of the way we describe culture is in terms of the "Three P's," or products, practices, and perspectives. Specifically, the World-Readiness Standards highlight the relationship among these three elements—for example, how do the practices and products of a culture influence that culture's perspectives? Within this framework, there are some opportunities and pitfalls. Most notably, if we carry a

superficial or content-based interpretation of that framework into our classrooms, we run the risk of perpetuating traditional approaches to culture that can foster stereotypes and that ultimately do not enhance students' cultural competence. Garrett-Rucks (2016) exemplifies this in her work by taking "a critical perspective of dichotomous cultural comparisons that inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes" (p. 18). Kubota (2008) developed a framework for cultural studies that replaced the 3 P's with what she coined the 4 D's of Culture:

1. Engaging students in a *descriptive* approach to the study of cultures rather than a prescriptive approach
2. Acknowledging the *diverse* nature of cultures, including variability and complexity within cultures
3. Recognizing that cultural study is *dynamic*; that is, culture isn't frozen in time; it needs to be studied diachronically, because social values and beliefs change throughout history
4. And finally, embracing the *discursive* nature of the construction of knowledge, that there are no objective truths.

Other authors have expanded the 3 P's framework itself to include more critical approaches. For example, Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell (2014) expanded the definition of products to include "access to and relationships with tangible and intangible resources" and practices to include "interactions among and within communities," for example marginalization and social hierarchies (Chapter 1). When we fail to take such a critical perspective, we leave students with a prescribed view of culture rather than an analytical/inquiry-based approach. Culture becomes "content" rather than the critical recognition of the dynamic nature of communities and their lived experiences.

As much work is being done on the implications of the new Cultures and Communities standards, those traditional approaches still linger in our classes and curricular materials today. Therefore, we as instructors need to take a critical approach in our own classrooms. Outdated textbooks and pedagogical tradition cannot have the last word in how we teach to the standards; we insist that cultures and communities ultimately must speak for themselves and students must engage in critical, reflective inquiry to discover cultures and communities.

Transformative Learning

Because ICC requires students to see the world in new ways, decentering their own experiences and taking up the perspective of the interlocutor (Byram, 1997), for many students the language learning experience becomes transformative. Transformative learning, a learning theory developed by Mezirow (1991), describes the learning process of reevaluating previously held beliefs and attitudes and learning to interpret experiences from a new perspective. Proponents of ICC make a strong case for why transformative learning is necessary:

> In ICC learning, students must also develop a sense of self, where they gain awareness about their own culture before embarking on discovering a second culture. Before being able to challenge their own beliefs and begin to understand and accept those of individuals from another culture, students must not only know what they believe but why they believe it. They must undergo an exploration of how they

developed their own understanding of the world. By questioning their own belief system, and even comparing it to those who share their home culture, they will become more prepared for exploring another culture and interacting with people from that culture (Moeller & Fatlin Osborn, 2014, pp. 680-681).

This process of critical examination, questioning, and interacting that Moeller describes can be explained and promoted if it is understood as the process of transformative learning. The lens through which one views the world, the collection of one's beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and linguistic/cultural norms, was referred to by Mezirow (1991) as a *meaning perspective*. Seeing the world from a fixed perspective according to certain expectations is how individuals make sense of their experiences. Mezirow (1997) also used the term *habit of mind* to refer to meaning perspectives, and, in fact, gave the example of "ethnocentrism, the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior" (p. 6) as a habit of mind. This example is of particular interest to language instructors interested in promoting ICC.

Tracing learning through the theoretical model of transformation, the information a student receives is filtered through the lens of the meaning perspective. One's meaning perspective consists of elements such as social norms and roles, cultural and language codes, common sense as a cultural system, and ethnocentrism (Mezirow, 1991). These sociolinguistic elements of the meaning perspective allow individuals to live within the structures of their native language and culture and readily discard any input from the world that does not fit in their system. A normal part of first language acquisition includes becoming indoctrinated in the codes and assumptions of one's native language and culture. Intercultural contact puts differently socialized individuals in communication, often resulting in conflict, or at the least, opportunity for miscommunication based on different frames of reference.

Perspective transformation, the hallmark process underlying transformative learning, is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive our world, making possible a more inclusive perspective and allowing the individual to act on new understandings (Mezirow, 1991). The process of perspective transformation is a movement from the conflict, also called the disorienting dilemma, to critical reflection, then to conscious action, and finally to integration, resulting in a new, broader meaning perspective.

In the end, the transformative learning process may turn out to be the most important one we provide our students. As Sosulski (2013) described, building relationships with people who are different from ourselves "involves calculated risk-taking for the student, and a willingness to deal with the problems, paradoxes and challenges of cultural difference. Being able to do this requires personal growth in students" (p. 92). Therefore, transformative language learning is not just about language at a surface level, but about improving ourselves and the ways we interact with others. It turns out that learning language is one of the most human endeavors we can undertake, and recent research in transformative language learning (Crane, forthcoming; Johnson, 2015; Johnson & Mullins Nelson, 2010; Kiely, 2005; Sosulski, 2013) helps us as teachers focus on the humanity underneath the language structures and support our students as they learn to see the world in entirely new ways.

Critical Pedagogy

The discussion of critical pedagogy in this essay refers to "any classroom practice that addresses difference, power, or social stratification in the classroom or in the world" (Johnson & Randolph, 2015, p. 36). It is informed and generated by critical studies in other fields such as critical race theory and gender studies. Crookes (2012) asserted that critical pedagogy is "the most widespread term for social justice oriented tendencies in applied linguistics and in language teaching" (paragraph 2). For the purposes of this essay, we categorize critical pedagogy as an umbrella term that not only describes social justice approaches but also contains them and serves as a vehicle for them. Social justice approaches are those that employ critical pedagogy in order to reach social justice learning outcomes for students. Critical language pedagogy, or even more broadly, critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), is the path we follow to arrive at social justice in our classrooms as a result of our instruction.

With *pedagogy* a widely recognized subfield in language departments, the term *critical pedagogy* reframes the discipline, asserting a separation from traditional pedagogy that reinforces the meaning perspective students have acquired from their first language and the social conditioning associated with childhood education. Critical pedagogy, in contrast, seeks to transform students' meaning perspective by resisting the primary social purpose of education: to indoctrinate the young with the social ideology that will allow then to thrive in their social group (Kennedy, 1990). Social institutions use traditional pedagogy to prepare students to function in the social conditions in which they find themselves. Critical pedagogy prepares students to resist, reconsider, reflect, and enact change in response to social inequity. Studies like the one by Pessoa and De Urzêda Freitas (2012) can give us insight into some of the challenges associated with moving from a traditional to critical approach in a language classroom.

The originator of critical pedagogy in language learning, Paolo Freire, termed this process of teaching *conscientization* (1970/2000). He makes a distinction between conscientization and what he terms *banking education*. Banking education is defined as a process by which the instructor uncritically transfers chunks of knowledge rather than making that knowledge the focus of critical reflection and awareness-raising. Critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of learners engaging in critical reflection. Because ideologies are hard to detect even in ourselves, uncritically transferring knowledge, by default, reinforces the existing structures and hierarchies. Critical pedagogy teaches students to become aware of how learning is constrained by ideologies embedded in language, social habits, and cultural forms that combine to shape the way we think about the world. These ideologies appear on the surface to be common sense, just the way things are, rather than structures that are deliberately skewed in favor of the powerful.

In his foreword to the most recent edition of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull (2007) stated the following:

> There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes "the practice of freedom,"

the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (p. 34, emphasis in original).

What are the implications of a language classroom where neutrality is impossible? Where we side either with traditional pedagogy that reinforces the status quo or critical pedagogy that questions the same? Pennycook (2001) described language classrooms as "sites of cultural struggle, contexts in which different versions of the world are battled over" (p. 128). Neutrality for language teachers becomes impossible because "language is not a neutral medium of communication, but takes on different meanings when the relationships between speakers change, together with shifts in relations of power" (Norton, 2010, p. 175). For many language teachers, critical pedagogy is not just a choice we make, it is an ethical imperative.

Social Justice Pedagogy: Considerations in Various Contexts

As we engage in discussions on how to incorporate social justice in the world language classroom, it is important to note that social justice isn't something "extra" that teachers have to add to an already crowded curriculum. As we clearly demonstrated above, social justice themes are compatible with and reinforce the goals of the Cultures and Communities components of the World-Readiness Standards. Such themes can also support the communication/proficiency goals of the curriculum, even at the novice levels.

An effective way to engage students with social justice themes is through a constructivist approach, in which learners are able to develop their own views about cultures and communities "through social interaction and interpersonal communication" (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 156). This student-centered framework allows students to confront authentic problems and topics; places the teacher in the role of a mediator instead of expert; fosters a community in which students are able to share opinions, solutions, and strategies; and enables students to reflect on their own learning and compare various points of view (Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Wright, 2000)

Osborn's (2006) Critical Inquiry Cycle provides some guiding principles for the incorporation of critical approaches, including social justice, into the world language curriculum. Osborn describes the cycle as "a process of exploration that can be entered into by students, community members, and teacher as learners together, in their individual contexts" (p. 33). The cycle consists of four phases: (1) informed investigation of a socially relevant problem, (2) inductive analysis to make sense of the problem in its relevant context, (3) the development of tentative conclusions which are by nature subjective and value-laden, and (4) mutual critical reflection in which the students and instructor engage in a community dialogue and are able to explore their own privilege, power, and powerlessness (Osborn, 2006, pp. 33-35).

Ultimately, the inclusion of social justice in the language curriculum comes down to a matter of backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Teachers may begin the process by asking such global questions as: What kind of students do we want to leave our classrooms? Do we think that elements of critical cultural competence and social justice are important? Do we see a need for students, and really society as a whole, to have a higher level of intercultural competence and to be advocates

for social justice in their immediate and global communities? Indeed, one need not look any further than our Twitter and Facebook feeds or the comments section of a controversial news story to see the need for people to be able to speak articulately and compassionately about social justice issues. There are great opportunities for this type of learning to occur in the world language classroom. In fact, by not incorporating social justice at all and instead adhering to traditional pedagogy, we are reinforcing the status quo and thus missing the opportunity to involve students in transformational learning within our classrooms.

Osborn (2006) identifies four pillars of social justice that can be used to guide teachers' thinking with regard to implementing social justice into the everyday curriculum: 1) identity, 2) social architecture, 3) language choices, and 4) activism. These four pillars relate to topics that are often already included as part of the world language curriculum. For example, teachers and students can approach "identity" from a social justice perspective while also studying such grammar and vocabulary topics as descriptive adjectives, personal pronouns, and the present tense. "Social architecture" can be examined alongside such topics as the past tense, formal and informal speech, schools, media, and entertainment. "Language choices" can be examined alongside such topics as speech register, the subjunctive, journalism, and politics. Finally, "activism" can be examined through extended spoken and written discourse, imperatives, social change, and marginalization.

In addition to Osborn's four pillars, there is a multitude of relevant themes that can be used as a gateway or springboard to incorporate social justice in the language classroom. Examples include: immigration, employment, environment, linguicism, racism, xenophobia, violence and weapons, stereotypes, sexuality, sexism, poverty, identity, education, institutions, marginalization, and diversity. These topics are not only relevant to cultures and communities of the target language but are also relevant to the language learners' own cultures and communities—and in many cases, the so-called target cultures and communities overlap or interact with those of the language learners. Thus, students not only look at how these themes are relevant in the target communities and cultures, but they also turn a critical eye to their own communities and cultures and examine how the intersections of some of those themes affect various groups of people.

Finally, in an earlier publication (Johnson & Randolph, 2015) we outlined specific steps for incorporating critical pedagogy and social justice themes into the classroom. We presented four guiding questions and a series of practical guidelines to help teachers begin the process of lesson planning within a critical, social justice framework:

1. Who is the source of knowledge? (Implication: Afford students opportunities to contribute to the curriculum, some level of autonomy with course assignments, and opportunities for self-evaluation.)
2. What resources do we use in the classroom? (Implication: Select a variety of authentic resources that provide counterpoint to dominant narratives, which more often than not requires going beyond the textbook and its ancillaries.)
3. How do we incorporate language proficiency with critical pedagogy? (Implication: Carefully plan instruction using a backward design to provide maximum contextualization of social justice themes and language objectives, and take ad-

vantage of technological resources like online journals and discussion boards to allow student to engage in critical reflection in English outside of the class.)

4. How do we respond to controversy? (Implication: First, expect and embrace conflict. Second, be proactive with establishing community and trust in the classroom and with engaging students in discussions so that they learn to navigate potentially polemic topics with diverse participants.)

As Nieto (2002) argues, "classrooms should not only simply allow discussions that focus on social justice, but in fact welcome them" (p. 41). Although the guiding principles for incorporating social justice in the world language classroom can be applied to all levels, there are some specific considerations that instructors must take into account when planning instruction for specific groups of learners. Below, we offer an overview of considerations at various proficiency levels and contexts.

Novice learners. A principal concern with novice (and even intermediate) language students is that they have not yet developed the necessary language proficiency to engage in critical reflection and critical discussion about social justice issues in the target language. As such, teachers must think beyond the confines of the World-Readiness Standards (which limit students to "using the target language") when implementing critical pedagogical approaches to cultural study. In order to avoid sacrificing valuable classroom time in the target language, teachers must carefully consider how to implement social justice learning objectives in a way that supports the development of the students' language proficiency in the target language. The social justice themes must be closely linked to language topics of novice courses, the resources must be carefully selected with accompanying level-appropriate comprehension activities, and students must be allowed to reflect in their native language in a way does not stifle their language development in the target language.

As an example, we will consider a typical first unit of a level one language class in which students are learning how to say their names and how to describe themselves using basic adjectives. The teacher could introduce a social justice theme at this early stage of language development by incorporating readings, activities, and discussions relating to the identity politics and stereotypes associated with names. Consider the following activities that can be incorporated into a Spanish course (Oppewal, Zelaya, & Wooten, 2016; Randolph, 2016):

- Introduce cognates that students can use to make basic responses (e.g., controversia, estereotipo, discriminación, racismo).

- Give students a list of common names in both English and Spanish. Ask them if they (or others) would make assumptions about the person's identity (gender, race, nationality, level of education, native language) based on their name.

- Prepare an activity in which students match the anglicized stage names of celebrities of Latino or Hispanic descent with their original Spanish-language names. Brainstorm what may have been the motives and benefits for such changes and if attitudes have changed over time.

- Gather authentic resources from the media (articles or videos) that highlight various perspectives. Relevant resources in English can be read and reflected upon outside of class. Resources in the target language can be studied in class through collaborative activities. For target-language texts too difficult for novice

students to understand, "edit the task, not the text" (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 197); that is, change what you have students do with the text instead of modifying the text itself. Sample comprehension strategies that can be incorporated at the novice level include:

- Students write a title for each paragraph.
- Students express their reaction with 140 characters or less (a "tweet").
- Students identify the three most important sentences of the passage.
- Teacher distributes a list of simple sentences, and students organize the list in chronological order or in order of importance (depending on comprehension goals).
- Teacher develops a brief informal true/false or multiple-choice assessment.

• Have students complete follow-up assignments based on the resources examined and topics unpacked during class. Depending on the format and the level of critical engagement required, these assignments can be completed in English or in the target language. In addition, such activities can be purely reflective, action based, or a combination of the two. Successful follow-up activities that have been used in our and our colleagues' classes include:

- Students write a brief, simple letter in Spanish to respond to the views expressed by one of the authors or speakers from the authentic sources.
- Students compose a conceptual map responding to the question, "What does a name represent?" Students use simple words and phrases in Spanish to discuss implications at the individual, familial, communal, and societal levels.
- Teacher facilitates a follow-up reflective discussion in English about stereotypes and hegemony.

As the sample activities above show, with careful planning and strong, thematic curricular design, students are able to engage in meaningful social justice work as early as the first week of a level one language course. The social justice theme supports the students' language development in the target language while at the same time offering opportunities for students to complete some activities in English to engage critically at the highest level possible. While language teachers may want to keep their students engaged in the target language 90+% of the time (as recommended by ACTFL, 2010), the strategic use of English from time to time can aid in the incorporation of critical pedagogies without necessarily sacrificing language proficiency goals (Johnson & Randolph, 2015; Lee, 2012).

Intermediate learners. At the intermediate level, language learners are beginning to produce more original thought with complete sentence discourse. While they do not need as much scaffolding and support as novice learners, their language level is still not at the place to engage in nuanced discourse about social justice issues. Thus, many of the strategies and activities highlighted in the previous section can also be applied to intermediate learners, including the strategic use of English to achieve critical pedagogy goals.

As intermediate learners develop increasing proficiency in the target language, teachers can replace traditional communicative activities with activities that revolve around social justice communicative contexts. For example, when intermediate students are learning how to narrate in the past, they can engage in discussions, conversations, and role-plays about the experiences that have shaped the racial, cultural, linguistic, sexual, and gender identities of themselves and others. Such activities can be used as a springboard for activist-oriented initiatives in which students begin to learn to have conversations about race and politics with individuals who do not share their own racial or political identity and to learn how they can be allies in their communities for issues that may not explicitly relate to their own identities (for example, how can a white student support the local Black Lives Matter movement?, or how can a straight student be an effective ally and advocate for LGBT rights?). To offer another example, when students are learning the subjunctive and imperative moods in a language like Spanish, as an activist-oriented assignment they could create websites or flyers outlining steps that their peers could take to join or support organizations within the local Latino community. Again, the goal is to embed social justice issues in a way that supports language proficiency goals and other elements from the world language curriculum while also allowing room for students to engage in transformative learning.

Service learning and study abroad. One of the greatest opportunities of the world language curriculum is that students can (and are expected to) use the target language "both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015). Indeed, interacting with speakers of the target language in the appropriate context can be a mutually rewarding and transformative experience for all parties involved. However, interacting with communities of the target language does present some possible challenges and pitfalls. For example, as mentioned previously, Byram (1997) cautions against approaching study abroad experiences from the mindset of a tourist rather than a sojourner. He writes:

> [A]lthough tourism has had major economic consequences, it is the sojourner who produces effects on a society which challenge its unquestioned and unconscious beliefs, behaviours and meanings, and whose own beliefs, behaviours and meanings are in turn challenged and expected to change. [...] Where the tourist remains essentially unchanged, the sojourner has the opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others' conditions (pp. 1-2).

Interacting with local target language communities also presents some challenges. Often, students think they are going into communities to help, save, or enlighten other populations. This is especially true for traditionally marginalized communities. Teachers can sometimes inadvertently contribute to this process by not providing adequate training for students before they interact with communities or by asking students to complete assignments that are intrusive or that reinforce stereotypes. Therefore, when interacting with communities, teachers must challenge students to maintain a critical mindset and be open to challenging and evolving their

own beliefs. Students must also maintain a sense of humility and recognize that they are serving *with* (not *for* or *on behalf of*) the community.

There has been much research on effective ways to interact with communities through service learning, study abroad, or ethnographic research (for example, Arends, 2014; Hartman & Kiely, 2014; Lee, 2012). Some practical experiences that teachers can plan include:

- Incorporate a pre-experience orientation outlining goals and expectations before students are asked to engage in work.
- Design assignments (e.g., journals, blogs, discussion boards) that allow students to constantly be engaged in self-reflection rather than analysis and objectification of other communities.
- Especially in unfamiliar communities, work with well-established communal organizations that have the same goals and outcomes as the people of that community.

At every proficiency level and in every context, the way we interact with students and with the content is transformed when we evaluate classroom practice through the lens of social justice. In Table 2, we offer an overview of how traditional practices may be reimagined to fit within this framework.

Table 2

Classroom Practices through a Social Justice Lens

Traditional Practice	Recommended Practice
Teacher presents a brief culture lesson in English or the target language through lecture, video, or reading.	Teacher engages students with a relevant cultural topic by using authentic resources that represent a variety of perspectives.
Students complete comprehension questions in English or the target language about a text.	Students are required to answer questions that call for critical reflection of the perspectives presented in a cultural text. Transformative learning, not mere reading comprehension, is the learning objective.
Students attend a community event and interview a native or heritage speaker.	Students attend a cultural event and interact with native and heritage speakers. Students reflect on themes of intercultural communicative competence (attitudes, conversational roles, openness to new perspectives, etc.) based on their interactions.
Teacher avoids potentially controversial or polemic cultural topics in favor of facts-based or superficial content.	Teacher works to build community and establish norms of engagement so that such topics can be discussed in a productive, respectful manner.

Teacher assumes the responsibility of selecting all cultural topics for the course.	Teacher allows students select relevant topics of high interest.
Teacher creates assessments that focus on cultural knowledge (facts, dates, monuments, etc.).	Teacher incorporates assessments that require critical reflection (e.g., journals). Students are given choice with assessments and are able to participate in self-assessment.
Lesson planning includes beginning-of-semester team-building activities and ice breakers.	All units throughout the semester incorporate low-stakes trust-building activities in order to establish and continually reinforce community.
Textbook is accepted as the primary and authoritative resource for the class.	Textbook and other language learning materials are examined critically and supplemented with authentic resources and diverse perspectives.
Teacher keeps detailed lesson plans and reflects on her own work each term.	Teacher works with a community of language teachers to develop plans, reflects on own and others' practices, and shares successes and failures with others. Knowledge builds over time and is published openly in order to facilitate broad participation in larger conversations about teaching social justice.

Opportunities for Professional Development

One of the most underutilized resources teachers have is a community of colleagues. Connecting with colleagues at meetings, at conferences, through social media, and even across disciplines allows teachers to benefit from the experiences of others. In particular, for teachers who may not have other language teachers in their school or in their immediate geographical area, taking advantage of state and regional language teaching resources and connecting digitally with colleagues becomes essential. Additionally, some teachers may even face resistance from colleagues when they begin engaging in what Pennycook (2001) referred to as the "dangerous work" (p. 138) of critical pedagogy. Social justice work is about communities, and it works best when done in community. We need each other for support and encouragement, as well as for honest critique and accountability.

For teachers interested in connecting with professional organizations where they can find supportive communities of colleagues, this year will see the arrival of at least one new ACTFL special interest group (SIG) focused on Critical and Social Justice Approaches to language education. All of the topics of this essay as well as many other critical approaches are within this new SIG's mission to cultivate a community of educators committed to consciousness raising and community action in and through language education. There are also organizations such as ISLS (International Society for Language Studies) that focus on critical approaches specifi-

cally. And on the state level, groups such as FLANC (Foreign Language Association of North Carolina) hold annual conferences for teachers. This past year, FLANC's theme was "Empowerment, Transformation, and Social Justice." Teachers from all over the state were able to come and develop professionally around those common themes. Consider getting involved in the leadership of your local or regional organization and bringing that change to your state.

Social media also provides rich opportunities to connect with other teachers. Twitter has an active community of language teachers, as does Pinterest and Instagram. One way to build up your social media network is to follow people who post using hashtags related to conferences or topics of interest to you. Twitter in particular can be a great way to engage authors and other teachers in conversation around how to enact social justice in the language classroom. If you are reading an article and have questions or comments for the author, consider using Twitter to reach out and start a conversation.

For college instructors, many colleges and universities have language centers or teaching centers that provide high quality professional development around teaching and learning. For example, a teaching center may have programs and resources to support inclusive teaching and may provide training on how to have difficult dialogues in the classroom, both of which are important skill sets for teachers interested in social justice. Other centers or programs at your college may have incentive programs to improve instruction on campus. K-12 teachers may find support available through the district or state world language supervisor. Ask around your institution to find out where teachers can get professional or financial support for any kind of teaching, but in particular for working on diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice in their classrooms.

Some language teachers interested in social justice feel alone in their efforts. Although you may be the only language teacher in your school working on social justice, you may have colleagues in other disciplines engaged in these issues. Working with local colleagues from different disciplines can be a fruitful exchange. A reading group or weekly lunch meeting to discuss ideas, challenges, and successes can be beneficial for all involved. Although these cross-disciplinary colleagues may not be able to provide you with resources for facilitating second language acquisition, many good teaching practices do, in fact, apply across disciplinary boundaries. When others see what a small group of committed individuals is able to do, they may want to join in. In the end, building a coalition of diverse colleagues with a common goal will benefit all involved, may result in unexpected benefits, and will also set a good example for students of how to build relationships in service of social justice.

Finally, the most important tool teachers have at their disposal is knowledge. Read widely. Ask questions. Stay current on world events and how social justice advocates are responding to those events. Journals like *Dimension* publish a variety of articles and are freely available to teachers to read online. In fact, the 2018 issue of *Dimension* will be a special issue with a focus on social justice and critical pedagogy. Other journals like ACTFL's *Foreign Language Annals* and magazines like *The Language Educator* are included with organizational membership. Take advantage of these resources.

With all the opportunities for professional development, the biggest challenge

facing teachers may be information overload. Ideally, a social justice minded teacher would choose a few concrete steps that feel manageable and commit to moving forward one step at a time. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Call for Future Work

The research that has been done in intercultural communicative competence and community-based learning has changed the field for the better, legitimizing the possibility that our students will not only learn proficiency in our classrooms, but also learn how to engage the world with confidence and compassion. Some language education scholars have begun exploring the potential of transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy to promote the critical reflection and questioning that leads to social justice outcomes. As demonstrated above, research on the World-Readiness Standards, particularly the Cultures and Communities standards, have set the stage for a larger discussion for how we can engage with communities not as consumers, but as partners committed to confronting historical and present inequities.

Yet, there is much scholarship that needs to be done. In order to build a useful body of scholarship around social justice in language education, participants at all levels should document and share their experiences, ideas, pedagogies, and results of research. Some key areas of need in the field are highlighted below.

Service learning. A critical perspective requires changing how we think about service learning and community involvement. When we conflate service learning with social justice education, we run the risk of unintentionally replicating the social structures that led to inequity through the very programs that are meant to lead to social justice. Good research in this field expands or challenges the idea that service learning and other kinds of charitable activities automatically reflect a social justice framework. Research and pedagogical models that provide useful, replicable practices for teachers who want to do service learning are needed.

Classroom climate. At conferences and other meetings, people often ask us questions about successful classroom dynamics and relationships. More research is needed on how to create those safe spaces where debate is encouraged and kindness is valued, how to build trust and promote communication, and how to prepare students and teachers effectively for the type of high stakes collaborative projects we ask them to do.

Curriculum development. Integrating language and proficiency goals with culture and social justice goals is challenging. There are no textbooks that lay out a roadmap, and perhaps, nor should there be. Social justice education requires teachers to bring the real world into the classroom and to respond to students as unique individuals. In each context, the methods and content may be different. However, developing level-appropriate practices and objectives that could be adapted by teachers for their own local contexts would be a tremendous step forward and would provide teachers new to this arena with a way forward.

Faculty development. We must prepare teachers, including TAs, college instructors, teacher candidates, and every other category of language teacher, to recognize opportunities for and capitalize on productive discomfort in the classroom , and to interrogate their own perspectives as teachers. Best practices in training and supporting faculty as they engage in social justice work would be a timely addition

to the literature. When faculty strike out on their own and develop themselves professionally, or join with others to seek professional development in community, they should consider setting the goal of writing publicly about the steps they took so that others can follow in their footsteps.

Marginalized perspectives. In language education, we need more diverse voices and approaches. Part of social justice work is amplifying the voices of the marginalized. As a field, let's make a commitment to creating space for everyone to come to the table and share their experiences, their challenges, and their ideas.

Action research. We love reading high quality empirical research conducted by university faculty of the sort that is prevalent in language teaching journals, and hope to see more of that sort of work around social justice. However, the field also needs more classroom teachers publishing their successes (and failures) whether in traditional academic venues and at conferences, or on blogs and social media. We need useful models and authentic experiences from those doing the work in their own classrooms. Action research is not only useful as professional development for the teacher involved; it also contributes to the field when published by adding to the body of knowledge. We hope to see more grassroots, action research efforts coming from classroom teachers.

Above all, the most important way we can contribute to the current movement of social justice in language education is in our own teaching. In our classrooms, taking one small step at a time, we have the opportunity to share with our students that the world is bigger, more complex, and more beautiful than they know. There are real challenges, but there are also groups of people who choose to work together to address those challenges. There is no better place than a language classroom to explore how to communicate across differences and work together to solve real problems. We leave you now with a call to action: Take small thoughtful steps to promote social justice in your classroom; bring students, community members, and colleagues along as partners in your work; and report back to the community of language teachers. As ACTFL's (2016) statement on the value of language learning in promoting unity stated, "We remain hopeful for a future where cultural and linguistic diversity is viewed as an invaluable asset that enriches the lives of all" (paragraph 4).

End Note

[1]Although the use of the terms "native speaker" and "native culture" serves as a convenient frame of reference when discussing linguistic and cultural goals for our students, it is important to remember that such constructs are abstract ideologies that oversimplify the complex nature of languages and cultures (see Train, 2007).

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