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Last weekend, at the 2015 TFLTA, I attended “Alsace Online” presented by Laurie Ramsey, a mixed panel on Issues in Higher Education Post-Secondary Foreign Language Teaching, and a presentation on La Guadeloupe by Daniel Noren. The first and last panels were more useful as a practice in critique, whereas the middle panel painted a helpful albeit discouraging picture of potential issues I may have to deal with in the future as an aspiring foreign language professor.

First and foremost, the Alsace Online panel presented a very creative way to consider teaching culture, geography, and history to students. The website was organized into Basics/ Famous Alsatian Contributions/ Historical Highlights/ Culture / Teacher’s Resources / Posts. One of the presentation activities involved us looking at a timeline, and answering multiple-choice questions about important dates. This activity was ill-conceived, because if students just looked at the dates, they could figure out the answers; it would not even help their reading skills. Later, when the presentation focused on Albert Schweitzer, an Alsacien who won the Nobel Peace Prize, once again the intention was great, but the activity poorly executed; one of her links to learn about him on an outside page was riddled with typos. If one is going to construct a website that utilizes outside (inaccurate) sources, it’s going to reflect poorly on the creator, even if they had nothing to do with it. Additionally, the video she gave on the website about Schweitzer was so old and distorted that I had a difficult time understanding it, and there weren’t even subtitles. Considering this website targets language learners, not specialists, the video was a poor

choice. As Dr. Scott suggested, the idea of a website to promote a particular region of France (say, Aix) is fantastic, but the execution left a lot to be desired.

Concerning the following talk on issues in teaching foreign languages in secondary education, I appreciated the glimpse into what may well be my future; presuming I am able to obtain my PhD (*l'espoir ne meurt jamais*), there is a strong possibility that at least one of my future positions will be either at a community college or a large state school – both of which have to follow stricter state regulations and policies than some private universities. My eyes were opened to a number of shocking realities regarding secondary education: for example, how foreign language is sometimes viewed as an obstacle rather than a bonus on the quest for a degree, how many language-deficient students are waived in to universities to boost enrollment, how the SACS has a massive (and detrimental) influence on foreign language teaching, how the prohibitive cost of ACTFL implementation discourages language teaching, how a 137-credit-hour degree has been reduced to 120 credit-hours, and how the fight for foreign language has actually regressed in Tennessee since '89 . I was most struck by the implications of waiving foreign language-deficient students; there are these rural, under-funded schools that cannot afford foreign language teachers, and these students are encouraged to go to college despite their deficiencies (which seems fine, at least they're going to college, right? Well...). This means that students from possibly sheltered, undereducated backgrounds – who could potentially stand to benefit greatly from a broader worldview being introduced to a second language and culture, miss out on that opportunity entirely. I was also stunned by the realization that many of those individuals who have power over what programs gain funding (hint: not the arts or foreign language) most likely are monolingual; they may not understand the importance of learning more languages, and could take any suggestion to do so as a personal attack. Although this talk painted a grim picture for the future of foreign language in post-secondary education, there were hints of hope in the form of clever tactics; for example, when foreign language is tied to popular, well-funded programs like medicine, suddenly

foreign language is valued; it just takes flexibility, creativity, and an extraordinary amount of groundwork.

Finally, I attended a decidedly dreadful presentation on Guadeloupe. The talk began with a clever game idea that would work well in classrooms; each person had a sheet of paper with a particular food, drink, culturally significant object, or activity on it, and they had to help each other figure out what it was. Additionally, the pre-listening and post-listening to a creole song was well-conceived. However, the dancing lesson for the zouk and the cha-cha, rather than being a respectful but fun lesson, served to “folkloriser le folklore” as Diana put it; it felt more like a disrespectful mockery of the culture, especially since no authentic examples were shown; it was tackily executed. Then, there was a “compte creole” acted out, the « Partage de morts entre le bon Dieu et Lucifer »- which was fun, but would probably never work in a college setting; the entire lesson was somewhat infantile. Finally- and perhaps, worst of all, was a presentation on a “Service Learning” trip to Guadeloupe that the university (Ferris State) regularly carried out. I’m always a little suspicious of anything “service learning”- all too often, it seems more like a glorified vacation that leaves the guests feeling fulfilled and gratified, but actually does very little to help the local population, and evokes ideas of “poverty tourism”. The presenter would have been more correct to simply call the trip a vacation with language learning opportunities. All that all of the snorkeling trips, tours, and museum visits do in the way of service is to benefit the local tourism economy- better to just be honest about it.

All in all, the conferences I chose were best thought of as learning opportunities in what not to do in the classroom; don’t refer to error-laden outside resources, don’t choose old video footage that is very difficult to understand, and be very mindful when presenting Francophone cultures, to do so in a respectful and informative way, rather than exoticizing and perpetuating stereotypes.