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Book Review

Words and Actions: Teaching Languages through the Lens of Social Justice by Cassandra Glynn, Pamela Wesley, and Beth Wassell

In their book *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages through the Lens of Social Justice*, authors Cassandra Glynn, Pamela Wesley, and Beth Wassell relate their conception of social justice education in the foreign language classroom. As teachers of German, Spanish, and French, these three scholars interrogate the limitations of current trends in foreign language education. The most important limitation lies in the lack of diversity in the target cultures presented to students. Moreover, foreign language classrooms have an obligation to consider the diversity of its student population. *Words and Actions* employs a definition of social justice which draws from multicultural education specialist Sonia Nieto's definition. It valorizes an ideology which treats all people with fairness and equity and which feeds into actions combatting stereotypes and flawed systems of power. Considering the ACTFL's incorporation of global and intercultural competence to their teaching standards, Glynn, Wesley, and Wassell translate these goals into an innovative pedagogical approach whose main goal is inclusivity. This book not only presents an important issue in foreign language teaching, but also provides tools and examples for incorporating social justice issues in the classroom. *Words and Actions* is essential reading for language educators in today's global climate.

The beginning of social justice education lies in the teacher's own perspective, privilege, and experience. In chapter 2, the authors present a series of questions designed to prime a teacher before he or she addresses the students' varied identities and perspectives at the beginning of the course. Next, the book presents strategies for the design of social justice units. As established in the preface, behind the understanding of social justice education is a communicative methodology with a backward course design. Before creating the daily lesson plans, one must begin with larger thematic goals. Glynn, Wesley, and Wassell apply their philosophy of social justice education to widely practiced methods of unit planning. The unit goals work in conjunction with the ACTFL standards and what the book calls the "social justice take-away understanding" of the theme. Social justice issues can belong to one of the categories of products, practices, and perspectives, while understanding that both products and practices ultimately relate to perspectives. While some social justice learning objectives will coincide with language learning objectives, one must also keep in mind that it is sometimes necessary to create lessons which focus solely on social justice objectives.

One of the most essential questions I had before reading the book concerned the feasibility of social justice education in courses with prescribed textbooks and curricula. In chapter four, the authors address this concern directly. The idea of social justice education centers on enabling students' critical thinking in a way that presents a diverse culture in the target language. The book argues that most textbooks provide the entry points to broaden your lesson toward diversity and inclusivity, keeping in mind that social justice issues focus on products, practices, and perspectives. The book suggests asking certain questions, such as whether or not there is a history behind the cultural topic or an "accepted truth" that can be interrogated. In this way, the teacher can open the discussion of culture to include the perspectives of marginalized peoples. The teachers will also modify the assessments to accommodate the expansion of the textbook content. The next chapter relates the social justice objectives of unit planning and curriculum

mapping to lesson planning and assessment planning. Even in summative and formative assessments, teachers should include social justice issues so that there is evidence of student comprehension and engagement in the material. To that end, the book presents self-assessment and reflection as important strategies for testing at the end of each unit, and the Appendix material provides not only a list of online resources for self-assessment but also planning templates, various social justice themes, activities, and rubrics.

The final chapter addresses potential questions real teachers ask about social justice teaching. Many of these concerns extend the concept of social justice education to service learning projects. However, this chapter proves most beneficial in its attention to specific, contextual applications of social justice learning. For example, the first question relates to the implementation of social justice education at an elementary level. The response maintains the adage that a teacher adjust the task and not the content. While young students will not likely benefit from contrastive cultural comparisons, they can benefit from addressing stereotypes and discrimination, especially when the teacher provides visual narratives and relates the lesson to the students' community.

Each chapter begins with an anecdote which the authors have written based on real-life personal experiences. As a result, social justice education is practical, not just a theory or educational philosophy. These anecdotes also provide context for the chapter before beginning to lay out the structure of each phase of course creation. When paired with the various quotes from educators, the book blends the technical manual with a personalized manifesto. The book seamlessly relates social justice education to backward course design and to Integrated Performance Assessment, even while it relies on the anecdotes to convey a greater sense of urgency than one usually finds in a course-creation guide. Rather than presenting a new methodology for teaching, *Words and Actions* proposes a means to push foreign language education forward to match the intersectionality of a multicultural and diverse world.

I was surprised to see that the authors had incorporated personal activities for educators to complete both individually and in discussion groups. Individual activities are indicated by the title "Your Turn," while group discussion questions follow each chapter's conclusion. These pedagogical tools illuminate the idea of social justice by structuring unit and lesson planning for teachers. However, these tools are only as useful as the reader makes them. For example, an educator who does not have a group of colleagues with whom to read the book would not be able to engage in a dialogue about his or her answers to the questions. While this does not negate the value of these discussion questions to an individual educator, I would recommend that this book be digested and shared. Social justice is, after all, invaluable to community enrichment, and learning about its role in the classroom is likewise best completed in a community.

Considering the current tumultuous relationship between the United States and its diversity, social justice education is a timely, essential topic of study. *Words and Actions* not only provides teachers with the tools to create a safe place for intercultural dialogue, but it also allows for adaptation to diverse classroom settings. The foreign language classroom is uniquely equipped to provide a place for students to understand themselves and their role in the world around them. By presenting diversity in the target culture, educators facilitate a greater appreciation for differences in others. I would recommend this book to novice and experienced foreign language teachers of any level.