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Foreign Language Education for All

Foreign language education should be standard from the time we start kindergarten until (and possibly lasting through) college. My foreign language education did not officially start until I was in middle school when I took french for one year, and even after that class I still felt as if I hadn't learned much. It was an extremely basic french class taught by a teacher who had mainly taught english in the past. The class got me interested in foreign language acquisition, but fell short due to the small pools of languages that I was able to take up until college. From the perspective of the whole, my main gripe with foreign languages in primary and secondary school were the limited choices. Spanish and French were the primary languages taught at the schools I attended. However, I never enjoyed learning either of these languages. Knowing Spanish was a good skill to have in a state like California, however, if I was able to learn Japanese earlier it would have greatly benefited my studies up until now.

The sentiments expressed in this article also reign true for my own personal beliefs. Foreign language education early allows one to gain skills needed in the long term. Learning a language from an early age not only allows a student to grow up bilingual, but it also makes learning successive languages easier. Many of the friends that I made from European countries, while I was abroad, grew up learning 3 to 4 languages. They believed learning those languages early on helped them better learn Japanese in the long term. This leads me to believe that studying a foreign language early expands a person's ability to learn other things.

My future plans with studying foreign languages would lead to me eventually becoming a translator or interpreter for the government or a private company (if my Japanese ever becomes fluent enough). Japanese has been a great starter for opening my eyes to the benefits of studying a foreign language, and I eventually want to start learning Korean. Learning Spanish felt like a chore, but with Japanese, I can learn the language in multiple forms that I enjoyed already. Whether it be from Japanese video games, television, news reports, or music, there are multiple ways that I learn bits and pieces about the language everyday. If children are exposed to these types of things early, I also believe that it will fuel their drive to learn more about other languages and the culture that surrounds them.

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Reading Reflection #2

The need for global education is an issue that gets brought up time and time again but there seems to be a lack of an effort from multiple societies around the world. While I was studying abroad this past year, my exchange university had adopted the slogan “global university,” but I truly had no idea what that meant until after I had gotten back from Japan. The university was attempting to prepare its students for the reality of the world outside of Japan, which is why many of the elective courses brought up issues on a grander scale than just that of the nation at home. I took a class that specifically focused on the issues going on in south Asia, and another class that taught me about how Japan is still fighting for territory that Russia and Korea both believe that they’re also entitled to. It was interesting to learn things from both the Japanese perspective and the outside perspective.

Global education is nothing new, but today there seems to be a bigger push for educating students on global issues so that we can be better prepared for the future. “Citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to function in their cultural communities and beyond their cultural borders” (educating global citizens in a diverse world), and this is very much still true for today. I believe the main issue lies in where we should start; at what age is it appropriate to make a push for globality within the mind of the younger generation? In my case, that quest didn’t truly start until I was in college, and I mainly learned about global issues from the perspective of the Japanese community. However, that knowledge led me to learn more about other communities as well; whether it be from an economic, military, or social standpoint. This service learning class has made me realize how important teaching students at an early age about different types of culture can help better shape their understanding for the future. We need to get students interested in the idea of globality; it’s not something that should just be forced upon them. However, when they decide that they have found that drive to pursue knowledge outside of the spectrum of their home countries, then we can truly begin to see a shift from close-mindedness to global educator.

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Reading Reflection #3

The world-readiness standards for learning languages are key elements that are used to help broaden the minds of students learning languages in our 21st century. The key to these standards are the “5 C’s” of learning which stand for: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. In my opinion, culture and communication are the basis for learning any language. Before you can even begin to learn a language, I feel like you need some sort of cultural background. Furthermore, without that cultural background you have no firm base for the language; there is nothing out there for you to reach out and grasp. For example, my start in the Japanese language came from my interest in animation and video games. I wanted to learn Japanese because I wanted to play games without subtitles and understand cultural nuances present in those video games and animation. When I began learning Japanese in college, I was able to channel that desire by studying items from that culture (like manga, anime, and video games). From that base, I could begin to form “connections” within the language and “compare” the differences and similarities between Japanese culture and American culture. I believe that you begin to form “communities” when you start to apply your language learning to a broader group of people, whether that be students studying abroad or in the workforce. Developing a community of friends and co-workers can make learning any language easier and more enjoyable.

One thing that I believe is extremely important to remember as a language learner is that it is a lifelong process. People want to immediately communicate with native speakers when they’ve only been learning the language for a year or an even shorter period of time. It took me forever to become comfortable with talking to Japanese students, even when I had been in Japan for a period of more than half of a year. In terms of interpersonal communication, you should be ready to make mistakes and have people help correct you. That was one of the hardest things for me to grasp when I first started learning Japanese. I was afraid to make mistakes and even more afraid to be corrected, but these helped me greatly understand the language and improve.

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Reading Reflection #4

The idea of cross cultural ethics stems from our basic moral principles in relation to other cultures. The author of this paper uses abortion as an idea to demonstrate cross cultural ethics. While we may have the freedom to decide here in the US if abortion should be allowed or condemned; there are many factors that we must consider for each side's argument. The same can be true for countries with different moral and ethical principles. Japan and the US have very different ethical backgrounds, for example, marijuana is a very hot topic in the US. It's legality has basically become more widespread in the US, but in Japan it still is considered a drug that can get you a heavy amount of jail time. The argument becomes that people should be allowed to smoke the drug for medicinal and recreational purposes, but in a place like Japan; it could be seen as a drug that has none of these benefits.

Learning a language also means learning the meaning behind why another culture behaves a certain way towards a certain ethical situation; you can begin to learn and create a dialogue based upon the issues present in that country and your own. The idea of a "global citizen" includes learning about things like cross cultural ethics, because it shapes how you come to understand and answer problems present within another person's culture.

An issue that is ever present in all parts of the world is that the average family is "too busy to delve in depth into politics" (cross cultural ethics). We tend to focus on issues that are only present in our country or that relate to our allies. We need to develop an understanding of the bigger picture and how it affects the whole world. I believe that learning a language allows you to do that. You can delve into certain parts of a culture that you may have never been able to address before (like their media or news).

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Reading Reflection #5

The issue of race, stereotypes, privilege, and marginalization exist in all parts of the world, regardless of a person's standing. As a black man, I have heard multiple times that black men can't swim or that I'm predisposed to stealing or growing up without a father. It takes a big person to shrug things like that off, but it's just something that I have accepted as a part of the day to day routine that we call living. While studying abroad, and during my journeys studying Japanese culture, I noticed that US media tends to generalize things that are uniquely "Japanese" as something that exists in the realm of weird or extremely cute culture, while shrugging off Japan's rich and historic culture.

In this service learning class, we take on the roles of instructors or teachers. I've noticed that privilege and marginalization are present even at young age. There were kids in my service learning group who were outed for being different or who changed their behavior based on the needs of the group; in the hopes to be socially accepted. However, on a deeper level, these students and their families are affected by some the biggest issues caused by the idea of privilege. Poverty, lack of education, and lack of help are all issues that stem from the idea of privilege. One of the reasons why I truly enjoy service learning is because it allows us to impart our wisdom and knowledge into a younger person's mind. Who knows if these students would have ever been introduced to another culture? However, many of them would thank us for our lessons that that they could now teach to their parents, or they were just extremely proud to have something to show off. Diversity is an extremely powerful resource to utilize in the modern world because it allows us to appreciate what everyone has to offer. We must learn to shy away from the idea of prejudice and power because it goes against the whole idea of allowing diverse people to be.

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Reading Reflection #6

Three different ideas are explored in the articles by Illich, Remen, and Sigmon. For starters, Illich believes that people do service for all of the wrong reasons. We don't go to another country and offer our help out of the good of our hearts, but because we know that it will benefit us in some way, shape, or form. The problem stems from our "alienated feelings and concepts" (To Hell with Good Intentions). The institution is what drives our motivations and what makes the idea of service seem so appealing. However, without understanding the other cultures language, morals, or ideals; we end up doing more harm than good.

Remen believes that the ego and soul are involved when we decide to do or take on a service. When you are "helping" or "fixing" something, that is derived from your ego because you believe something to be weak and in need of repairs. On the contrary, when you are doing a "service" to someone there is no thought involved. Your actions are derived from the inner depths of your soul, because there is a prevailing want to do something. These ideals come from her patient and physician based background. Remen believes that her actions are affected based on the conflicting interests of her ego and her soul.

Sigmon believes that everything should happen from a community based standpoint. We should listen to the issues and ideals of the community and pay attention to their concerns before jumping in with our own input. He believes that a lot of service learning is derived from blind ambitions that do not take into account how the community may feel. We use our service to derive experience or gain something from the community (i.e. we use them). For there to be an equal balance, we need to serve and listen to each other, regardless of if we are the one doing or receiving the service.

All three of these authors have different viewpoints on the idea of service that are each taken on different extremes, however, the main point of each of their viewpoints is that we must change our minds about the idea of service. We need to take into consideration what the community we may be helping needs and do them services free from our own ambitions or

biases. Once we can begin to do that, then we can begin to see more genuine service being done in these communities.

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Reading Reflection #7

This paper defines culture as “traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values that are shared amongst a group of people” (Creating a Multicultural Classroom Environment). Recognizing differences within one’s own culture is the catalyst needed to create a sufficient idea in the mind of a child. Once we begin to recognize that everything isn’t as simple as what we see in our own neighborhoods, we can begin to expand our minds and create a multicultural classroom environment.

One of the ways we did this in our service learning lessons, was by allowing students to draw cultural comparisons between things that we specifically identified to them as Japanese. A lot of them began to realize that while many asian cultures share similarities, there are nuances and differences that make them each individually unique. We wanted to create a dialogue early and give the students a platform to express their perceptions of a certain cultural idea, but then slowly and surely change those perceptions based on what we had learned. We wanted to know about what type of holidays they celebrated, what their families were like, and how they lived their day to day lives. We used that information to draw comparisons and highlight why some things are apparent in all cultures, not just Japanese culture or Hispanic culture. You have to make the lessons engaging on the surface but have a deeper meaning below. A majority of the time, many of the students couldn’t believe that something that they had grown up with (for example animation) was tailored to some facet of culture that they had never learned about. Many of them blur the lines between American culture and other cultures so it’s very rewarding to see them begin to differentiate between the two.

The article states that acceptance and diversity are the key to creating a multicultural environment, and I too believe that that is the case. When you truly start to understand and accept someone else’s culture, it becomes so much easier to create diverse multicultural classrooms.

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Reading Reflection #8

The survey's findings are similar to what I would expect to find in most classrooms. My Japanese language courses always tended to focus on a specific theme or subject and then teach us grammar and vocabulary that would allow us to talk about said topics. While I can't speak much for those learning Swahili; I never really recall learning many things about Spanish culture when I was taking my Spanish courses back in high school. My Japanese classes focused on topics that ranged from eating culture, poverty, aging society, and politics. However, I do believe that you need to introduce these sort of topics at certain levels. Social justice issues didn't become prevalent in the curriculum until I studied abroad and got into higher level classes. I honestly attribute this to the nature of difficulty of Japanese (or any language really). You would usually expect more difficult topics to become talked about as your level and understanding of the language increases. However, I do think more focus needs to be done on teaching cultural significances in the language early on. I like the idea of having an idea or concept that you can grasp in your mind and then develop your language and knowledge around talking about that topic. It makes learning the language much more interesting and lets you explore the culture and ideals more genuinely.

In terms of diversity in the classroom, I would say the my high school classes were fairly diverse when it came to Spanish, however, as soon as I got into college a complete 180 happened. Most of the Spanish classes offered at my university are primarily taken by heritage speakers wanting to get a better grasp of the language. In my Japanese classes however, there was a larger range of ethnic diversity among the students, possibly due to the fact that we don't have many heritage speakers of Japanese in the Monterey area (at least not on the same level as Spanish).

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Reading Reflection #9

The wealth of benefits that come from second language acquisition are too high to count. However, in terms of the study, I do believe that the enhancing cognitive development early on and allowing for basic skill development are the two most important things that learning a second language can do for us. However, the sad reality is that many people aren't given such opportunities. For example, I was born in California, which is a place where I could have greatly benefited from learning Spanish early on along with English. However, many children like me aren't afforded that opportunity. There are numerous studies that have shown that second language acquisition at an earlier age makes students think more critically and have a more creative brain. Many of my friends who grew up learning English and Spanish were very bright smart children.

The study also states that these students who learn a second language early on can develop early cultural awareness and competency. In a world that is getting smaller and smaller as the abundance of technology runs rampant, the fact that ideas like these aren't being explored breaks my heart. We live in a culture now where developing young minds into global citizens not only enhances their feelings of accomplishment, but also allows for them to obtain higher honors and career opportunities. If you would have asked me in highschool if I ever believed that I would have gone to Japan before I had even turned 21, I would have said no. I can't think of a future now where my passion for learning a language wouldn't help me in my future; learning languages allows you to think on a different level.

Right now, there are many barriers that inhibit schools from allowing second language acquisition early on. Budget cuts and government spending habits do not allow language teachers to be hired over more traditional subjects. I hope that in the future, especially in a state like California, more foreign language teachers will be introduced into elementary and middle schools. Having that curriculum early on is the key to developing a more global minded society.