Reflecting on the Paradoxes of Foreign Language Teacher Education: A Critical System Analysis

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ABSTRACT: In the United States, Foreign Language Education is reshaped at a time when 75% of language teachers have retired, leaving an unprecedented vacuum. It is handicapped by paradoxes that prevent it from furthering its mission. Conjugating priority and neglect is a major challenge. Methods are often taught without epistemology, students tend to communicate without contents. Teaching of cultures is generally sanitized and stereotyped. Teacher educators professionalize student teachers who rarely understand their own cultural identity, potential foreignness and otherness. The student teachers' reflection is enforced and their autonomy paradoxically guided. The way to deal with these contradictions is to articulate new priorities and reconceptualize the field as the inescapable branch of learning for world peace and social justice.
Keywords: foreign language education – paradoxes – reconceptualization – politics of knowledge – language teaching

Reflexiones sobre las paradojas de la Formación del Profesorado de Lenguas: un análisis crítico del sistema

RESUMEN: En los Estados Unidos, la formación en lengua extranjera está siendo reformulada en un momento en el que el 75% de los profesores de lengua se han jubilado, dejando así un vacío sin precedentes. Se encuentra con la dificultad de ciertas paradojas que evitan que pueda seguir aumentando su objetivo. Conjugar prioridad y negligencia es un gran reto. Los métodos se enseñan sin epistenología; los aprendices tienden a comunicarse sin contenidos. La enseñanza de las culturas es normalmente aséptica y llena de estereotipos. Los formadores del profesorado profesionalizan a sus discípulos, quienes en pocas ocasiones entienden su propia identidad cultural, extranjería y otredad. Se refuerza la reflexión de los futuros docentes y su autonomía, paradójicamente, se guía. El modo de tratar con estas contradicciones es articular nuevas prioridades y reconceptualizar el campo la rama imprescindible del aprendizaje para la paz mundial y la justicia social.
Palabras clave: formación en lengua extranjera – paradojas – reconceptualización – politicas del conocimiento – enseñanza de lenguas

1. INTRODUCTION

The way we interpret the world is grounded in shared metaphors and allegories that have epistemic power and act as causal forces. Within this interpretive move, curriculum building

is a matter of consensual knowledge formatting and should be a dialogical process (Habermas, 1985). Curriculum shaping creates the categories of the school world and, possibly, the categories of the world at large (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2004). Such categories reveal inherited worldviews, what Bourdieu named *habitus*. Part of the U.S. curriculum has become monological. The top-down imposition of its structures does not meet the conceptualizations of teachers and educators (Grossman, 2005). This article will suggest that there is a clash between the structures defined for Foreign Language Education (hereafter FLE) and the declared goals of this discipline. The discursive nest of contradictions indicates the need to reconstruct the field and find solutions.

The present reflective considerations mesh experiential observations, autobiographical elements and reflections issued from the research literature. The conceptual framework is Critical Systems Theory (CST). CST «addresses theoretical, ethical, and practical issues in system practice with an eye toward balance and equity» (Bausch, 2001: 123). It rejects the split of humanity into two classes, distinguishing what Habermas (1985) named «social engineers» from the «inmates of closed institutions». The goal is to explicate the power agendas involved in design activities, whereas design is understood as an application of specific epistemologies in institutional settings. CST recognizes that the conditions for full rationality are not met in real life. For that it would require what Habermas (1985) defined as ideal communicative conditions, in which undistorted communication would allow a dialogue where best arguments could win. Since the conditions for pure reason are not met, they are approached through critical heuristics. Such heuristics represent an entry into dialogue. They counterbalance the imposition of institutional designs with their monological and normative dimension. The heuristic move lays down a critical way of understanding and accounting for incomplete rationalities, as their monological applications can manifest expressions that are opposed to their initial goals. For instance, attempts at hyper rationalizing—or super organizing—may bring chaos in human systems. Life does not obey incomplete and normative—i.e. monological—rationalities.

In this article I offer a deconstruction of current paradoxes in FLE. I lived its transformations during the last 8 years while heading a challenging and successful program. In deciphering my experience I will act on the emergent, embodied meanings of the discipline. The paradoxes I will analyze relate with the meaning of the discipline in the following ways:

1) Conjugating the national priority and national neglect for world languages in K-12 settings.
2) Innovating with such drastic improvements that programs are in shambles.
3) Teaching methods without epistemology, communicating without contents.
4) Teaching other cultures in a sanitized, depoliticized and stereotyped format: professionalizing student teachers who do not understand their own cultural identity, foreignness and otherness.
5) Enforcing the student teachers' reflection and guiding their autonomy.

These five paradoxes will be developed in the attempt at finding possible solutions to provide pathways to its future.

2. OF SOME PARADOXES THAT PLAGUE THE FIELD OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

1) The clash between the claimed national priorities and the huge current national neglect for world languages in K-12 education.

We often witness a clash between the claimed national priorities and the neglect and lack of funding for foreign languages. The economic priority is to get skilled professionals proficient in Less- and Least-Commonly-Taught-Languages (LCTL's). This priority is expressed in terms of the ability to guarantee security. It is also presented as crucial for communicating with other peoples and possibly adverse parties and bringing them a so-named democracy. The main reason for the clash may be the apparent lack of understanding, that—if you target proficiency—language learning cannot be a short-term enterprise. For acquisition to be deep, efficient in many pragmatic contexts, and subtle enough to take into account faint convers-at-ional stakes, you cannot skip a deep approach introducing target cultures, which requires at some point intensive immersion, preferably including home stay for better understanding of the culture (Karaman & Tochon, 2007).

The national neglect for languages in K-12 education is blatant. Languages in schools have been reduced to the point that both languages as disciplines and language teachers are endangered species (Tochon, 2009). The world language teacher shortage is devastating. It leads schools and districts to close entire programs. It may lead teacher education settings—in part because of the urgent needs for new teachers and in part because of budget cuts—to reduce the number of semesters in their programs. In the near future, it wouldn't be surprising to find quick fixes like *Two-Week-Long Summer certifications*. What is misleading is that foreign language is optional while being a requirement in the major universities. Reading between the lines of these policy statements reveals that language study is intended for elite students only. Hence the quasi absence of support for the bilingual children, those who precisely could meet the future, claimed needs for security. Ryuko Kubota (2005) demonstrated that poor bilingualism is of no national interest. The bilingualism of the poor is not economically worthwhile (Crawford, 2000). The suggestive myth conveyed to so many parents by many school advisors informing them that their children would be better forgetting about the home language may have a purpose. It maintains a class of workers who will be weak in both languages, will not access high positions, won't compete for high salaries, and will not challenge the status quo. The real, implicit priority is bilingualism among the elites, suggests Kubota (2005). Early January 2006, a series of articles have emphasized that the U.S. plans to spend hundreds of millions of dollars over the next five years to bolster foreign language skills within the military (Bowman, 2006).

But you cannot surface language learning and make somebody culturally proficient in one year of courses. Adults who have never cared for languages cannot be suddenly 'enforced' to become proficient in a foreign language, furthermore the language of the 'enemy'. Not to speak of the sociopsychological and cross-cultural problem: how will these soldiers *communicate* with the enemy. Nonetheless one educator who was drafted to teach Arabic found that the reading of Koran gave a spiritual dimension to the soldiers' understanding of their own situation. It is certainly of benefits to soldiers to learn about the 'target' language. It increases the chance

that there will be understanding. It may help building a humane rapport; there may be less fear when intruding in a foreign home and possibly fewer casualties (Tochon & Karaman, 2009).

Another example of paradox in the national priorities is the case of Chinese: the most widely spoken language is a less-commonly-taught language. We need to build the case for the majority of less- and least-commonly-taught languages (LCTL's). In particular, Chinese education is absent from the foreign language programs of teacher education institutions. Its place in FLE at large is minimal and rare. Beside my responsibilities for the 'major' languages in the School of Education, I was responsible for customizing solutions for the less- and the least-commonly-taught languages (hereafter LCTL's). In five years we had had two applicants for the 6-12 Chinese teacher certification. I was requested to seriously think about closing Chinese Education. We were—and still are—in a time of drastic budget cuts. Russian Education has been closed in our institution. How can teacher education institutions face such challenges, at a time their budgets are shrinking? The College Board that administers advanced placement exams added Chinese to its list of foreign language tests and, in a 2003 survey of American high schools, found that 2400 would like to add advanced placement courses in Chinese. However very few teachers were available because very few are being trained. This University provides programs for eighty languages currently. However, we offer three main teacher certifications: Spanish, German, and French. A few exceptions are made for Italian Education and Portuguese Education is also present; we have had one Japan-ese Education student and two for Chinese during the last five years. Certifying K-12 teachers for a multiplicity of languages (Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, etc.) requires a new academic mindset. We need to change our way of conceiving language education with regard to the less-commonly-taught languages. It should not be restricted to the College level and the Colleges of Letters. There is still a prevalent culture in Literature Departments about snubbing language teaching, a so-called «less conceptualized» field. We need to cross this epistemic border, as advised in the 2007 report of the Modern Language Association. It sometimes appears difficult for faculty in non-utilitarian fields of knowledge to take pragmatic stands, but we need to bridge the gap and reflect together on the ways to introduce LCTL's in K-12 settings. The second issue at stake is to provide teaching methods for LCTL's. The third large issue at stake in certifying K-12 teachers for LCTL's is student teaching. Even though part of the work can be done online through video case studies (Tochon, 2007), there is a need for K-12 field practice. We need to find solutions such as to organize K-12 school placements for student teachers in LCTL's in the absence of cooperating teachers in the target discipline.

We currently witness the enforcement of education priorities through controlled standardization. However the logic of efficacy and control seems counterproductive in education. The way it is generally articulated cannot be realistically achieved. Deeper educational goals that could help transform society are rejected in favor of more formal, short-term goals. School economic restructuring impacts the fragile balance that is required to maintain quality in Education. Trying to enforce quality through economic sanctions that increase the number of students in each class works as the opposite of the goal of reaching quality in education. There has been a manifest decrease in the quality of the contexts, settings and conditions in which world languages are learned and taught since quality has been overemphasized and enforced nationally. This brings us to the next paradox.

2) The logic of efficacy brings chaos: when drastic improvements put programs in shambles.

Most foreign language education programs have gone through drastic changes during the last ten years. This section presents a reflection on what happened in one particular program. It may not represent what has happened everywhere as we sometimes hear enthusiastic voices. Language teacher certifications on this campus are organized in the School of Education with instructors for French, German and Spanish sharing their time between the Language Department and Curriculum & Instruction (the 'didactics' department). Students have a professional sequence of courses in the School of Education after their undergraduate major in the target language. Foreign Language Education is independent from the Bachelor degree. At the graduate level there is a Master's degree for both in-service, professional development and research apprenticeship, a doctoral degree in Curriculum & Instruction for the FLE area as well as an interdepartmental doctoral degree in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which has a C&I strand. Recent innovations in our certification program have been numerous. In 1997, teacher training had been increased from two to four semesters and language education became part of Secondary Education. Table 1 presents the recent program changes.

Table 1. 1999-2010 Changes in the Foreign Language Education Program.

Year	Program Change
1999-2000	On this campus we were used to teaching language methods in the target language. The présupposé was that part of the methods might differ across languages. In 1999 a Task Force on foreign language education led us to change this course of action. Since 2000 student teachers with different languages are gathered in the same methods classes.
2000-2001	An add-on certification in elementary world language is experimented. Language minors are open to Elementary Education students and in-service teachers. Pedagogical evenings start being organized in school settings for in-service teachers to share their context, knowledge and experiences with student teachers.
2001-2002	All the teacher certification portfolios become electronic (it had been an option). They have to progressively match State Teacher Education standards that will be enforced in 2004. Student teaching abroad starts being offered in Argentina or Ecuador, France and Germany in the 4th semester of the program.
2002-2003	The FLE e-portfolios are extended to include the ACTFL Standards (5C's) as well as Teacher Education, State Standards. All the syllabi now specify the standards for each course and list e-portfolio assignments.
2003-2004	Elementary student teaching is offered as an option to Secondary Education students who want a K-12 certification.
2004-2005	FLE becomes a K-12 certification program. State law makes it mandatory for students to be trained at all levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Elementary Methods, Early Childhood Psychology and Elementary Student

	Teaching are included in the program. Breaking from Secondary Education implies a reconstruction of our curricular identity. It becomes like Music Ed and Phys Ed a 'left-over' discipline in search for a status, lacking clerical support and the curricular support we had received from the Secondary Education infrastructure and courses.
2005-2006	Student teachers must add a Professional Development Plan (PDP) to their e-portfolio for license renewal. This plan describes professional development activities that newly certified teachers intend to pursue during their first years of in-service teaching along with the standards to be developed. The diversity and human relations bylaw contents are integrated in the methods courses (in the Secondary Education program, they were dealt with in a specific course). Examples of contents are: the history, culture and contributions of women and various racial, cultural, language and economic groups in the United States; the psychological and social implications of discrimination, especially racism and sexism in American society.
2006-2007	The plan is to open a new Master's in Foreign Language Education (MAT) to certify teachers in less-commonly-taught languages in partnership with area studies. This FLE Master's program will have unique specificities in the sense that it could prospectively welcome up to 65 languages for certification, which will raise some of the concerns that are discussed in this article.
2008-2010	The MAT for FLE is tabled however it is being proposed for secondary education programs. Due to the budget crisis the language education cohorts are so small (less than 10 students) that the survival of the program is at stake.

These rapid changes are representative of changes in the whole State and in many parts of the country. They did not go unnoticed. In this program some students were in crisis because they did not want to student teach at the elementary level. There was bargaining across students' cohorts to keep some aspects of the previous program. The touchiest changes occurred at a time of drastic budget cuts, with uncertainty regarding program funding, funding for supervision, finding appropriate supervisors, and we had to find money for the changes to occur in an optimal way.

Due to the shrinking budgets of Education, the logic of efficacy is often counterbalanced by a lack of resources and time to make it work. Such programs require dedicated supervisors and teaching assistants (TA's). The TA/supervisors budget was drastically reduced in a few years. In the dominant market-based logic, an academic program is a business and is supposed to be profitable. But what is the financial gain when faculty must spend more than half of their time doing clerical work? The work of educators seems carefully planned not to allow them to have too much time for their critical work. Being constantly overwhelmed with continuous reforms, committees, administrative requirements, emergencies and pressure to report all kinds of activities for all sorts of institutional needs, they just cannot get the broad vision and time that is necessary to counteract the social abuse that is pervasive. In the pendulum swing, we are at the opposite of a society that would invest in reason, knowledge, and wisdom.

Educators need the energy and courage to start an in-depth analysis of what goes wrong in their everyday life and get mobilized as a social force. The business, efficiency model leads to so many short-term changes that quality is lost. Short-sighted decisions may lead to disaster.

A deeper analysis of the situation might show that the logic of change for efficacy is a political discourse used to hide the devastating effects of current reforms. It transfers to programs the responsibility for situations that have been created at the federal level.

3) Methods without epistemology, communication without contents.

Despite the discourse of value-free methods, today many scholars agree that methods cannot be separated from epistemology, and always have a moral and political dimension. Methods are not neutral endeavors: they proceed from specific worldviews. Teaching methods are related with complex issues regarding the nature of student knowledge and teacher knowledge, the classroom environment, school policies and society, and what may constitute worthwhile knowledge and interaction. Methods articulate human positioning and the nature of action in a school context. The assumptions that underlie the methodological stands need to be clarified.

For decades, FLE had its main focus on teaching methods. More and more methods are integrated as the diaphanous boundaries of «teachability» and meaning, however they cease to be the main focus. The focus are the learner's and the teacher's identities in the perception of cultural and linguistic otherness. The insistence on methods being apolitical is a political stand. However—despite current hyper-rationalist formats—in many teacher education settings methodological fundamentalism is on its way out. Teaching languages involves interpersonal situations, complex and dynamic contexts and social differences produced by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, linguistic status, money, power, and class (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Bhatt, 2005; Motha, in press). For the teacher, it is worth having multifold knowledge, multiple ways of knowing and interpreting situations, and adapting action within flexible methodologies. We are entering an era in which methods are considered by nature messy, uncertain, multiple, intuitive, improvisat-ional, self-critical, inquiry-based, and reflective. A similar phenomenon appears in the analysis of research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

When I observe a foreign language class, I note that activities are often focused on language structures rather than being student-focused. They are paced in a speedy sequence of 5- to 7-minute activities at a maximum. The rationale is that you have to keep up intensifying interactions in a way that will prevent students from being bored. It goes along with the TV culture of being spoon or even, force fed information, then asked to memorize for test taking. Actually students do not have much input, which would be key to increasing their motivation. It is as if the meaning of the discipline were in the meta-linguistic awareness rather than in broader life goals which language learning could fulfill. We can prepare prospective teachers with the «deep approach» (Tochon & Hanson, 2003) yet when they go in the field, the approach is lost. World Language teaching is a communicational discipline using communicative approaches, yet it is as if there was nothing to communicate. Closure exercises are followed with conjugation; students change tenses and fill holes in less-than-authentic texts. You seldom witness the interpersonal dimension in action.

4) Teaching of other cultures is sanitized, depoliticized and stereotyped: how to professionalize language student teachers who do not understand their own cultural identity, foreignness and otherness?

When you deal with languages, paradoxes arise that prevail all around. One of them is the frequent lack of proficiency of the teachers in the target language. To being able to

communicate in the target language, teachers must first master it. A deeper insight vis-à-vis other cultures implies respect, making it a point to increase one's proficiency. Too many teachers are not trained to master both pedagogy and the language. Well-trained, non-native speakers are fine educators when they are highly proficient in the language, which is required even when they teach early childhood (Curtain & Pesola Dahlberg, 2002). Using appropriate language for genuine acquisition in a classroom setting is an art. It implies both fine-tuned pedagogy and excellent language skills associated with the skill of simplifying sentences for purposeful instruction. Another aspect is the lack of depth in crosscultural understanding among teachers (Kramsch, 1993). It is related with the so-called dominant positioning of U.S. culture vis-à-vis the other cultures. For two years, Alejandro Azocar observed a Spanish teacher education program that we organize in a local elementary school. In this program, student teachers are the lead teachers for Spanish. Their mentor teachers do not speak the language therefore the program requires intensive university supervision along the model developed by Tochon & Hanson (2003). A teacher from Chile, Alejandro Azocar is a native speaker of Spanish. In Azocar (2005) he observed, among other aspects:

* The reluctance of student teachers to use Latin-American cooperative games and their preferred choices for American, competitive games transferred to Spanish, thus normalizing language teaching into their own culture.
* Their refusal of expressing and teaching socioaffective aspects of the Spanish culture.
* Their erasing of religious symbols as potentially inappropriate and promotional.

Azocar indicates how the teaching of one language is subordinated to imperatives of the dominant culture without this positioning being questioned or even seen by the student teachers. His perceptions of three cohorts of student teachers since 2004 suggest that most:

«are not able (or unwilling) to acknowledge themselves as cultural beings. I have discovered that most of these future Spanish teachers (all Spanish majors) see themselves as fundamentally American and native English speakers, and from that perspective they teach Spanish. These two features are so deeply engrained in their identities that both serve as 'colonizing ingredients'. Of course student teachers do not purposely act as colonizer agents (…). Governmentality and colonization happens unconsciously and subtly.» (A. Azocar, personal communication, January 8, 2006)

This phenomenon corresponds to what Foucault (1975) would have called the colonization of the mind, when the dominant ideology has been interiorized. This reminds the criticisms raised by Ivan Illich in 1968 against the mission-vacations in poor Mexican 'hoods that were fashionable among wealthy American students at the time: there is hypocrisy in ignoring the ambiguous role you are playing with the other cultures. Being a native of the culture being taught, Alejandro has been able to see things that student teachers were not able to perceive: his culture was being reshaped into something, which he did not recognize as a part of himself. The debate around his culture was depoliticized, normalized and reduced to games while real issues like cultural enminding were not addressed. The language and culture were conditioned and prepacked, Americanized within an acceptable format. In Germany for instance it might have been Germanized. The emphasis here is not on America as such. It is about the packaging

of other cultures and in particular cultures that are considered subservient by the dominant culture. There is a need for culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Culture is integrated in the methods classroom activities: it is one of the basic standards of language learning (5C's) ! However, often it appears to be sanitized and paradoxically modeled into the dominant culture. The concept and principles of learning otherness are most of the time out of sight. It would require some anthropological insight on the self. The demonstration that has made Reagan (2005a) in «Does language really exist?» is appropriate here: «the objectification of language leads not only to technicist approaches to language, but also serves to reinforce ideologies of linguistic legitimacy» (p. 10). There is no such thing as 'English', 'Spanish, or 'French', Chinese' or 'Russian'…and the same demonstration applies to cultures. Cultures have been objectified for the purpose of teaching, and their normalization processes are similar to other types of school normalizations (Valdman, 2001; Gass, Bardovi-Harlig, Magnan & Walz, 2002). Early research on school norms evolved internationally into a subtle conceptualization of «school genres» (Schneuwly & Dolz, 1997; Tochon, 2000). Not only is it difficult not to propose simplistic views of other cultures for the purpose of teaching, it is moreover impossible without taking a distance vis-à-vis one's own culture and how it filters what one perceives in the cultures of others. Further, no culture is monolithic. How can we account for this variability in Foreign Language Education?

5) Language teacher education programs enforce student teachers' reflection and paradoxically guide their autonomy.

This paradox amounts to requiring (and enforcing through evaluation) «genuine» processes to guide autonomy, a paradox that is typical of institutionalized education. In *The Foreign Self: Truth Telling as Educational Inquiry* (Tochon, 2002), I explored with a group of graduate students the pressures for conformity to social molds imposed by educational institutions. Foreign Language Education can be interpreted as an acculturation process. The students scrutinize the target cultures through alternating phases of rejection and assimilation. What a shock to their identity when students realize that they are no longer being viewed on their own terms, but rather through an interpretive grid that makes them foreign to what they are. This type of situation has been thoroughly studied in fields like bilingual education. It is typical as well of educational pressure in an intensive professionalization context such as a high-standards teacher education setting. School of Education curricula form epistemic molds that require an adaptation, assimilation and acculturation process for the student to survive in this new cultural environment, often qualified of «reflective» (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Portfolio-based reflections and journaling are organized for the students to convey their genuine way of growing in the educational adventure. The problem is, often student teachers' experience are rather trite. They don't know much what to observe and need to be taught about it. Male as well as female student teachers are obviously highly concerned with their appearance, are very self-oriented and do not pay much attention to what is happening in the classroom environ-ment while teaching. And thus they tend to come back with poor reflective journaling … until they realize that what they write will be the basis for their final course grade. Their instructors might want fascinating, reflective stories! Some among their peers may get the best grade if they have caught the instructor's attention with an outstanding awareness catching, a stunning revelation about selves, or a TV reality-show style event. Suddenly journaling becomes fictional, all kinds

of extraordinary problems are made up and arise in the schools where students seem to have witnessed horror stories and heroically succeeded in fighting school dragons. The result of 14 interviews of student teachers—male and female—on their reflective activities (Thompson-Cooper, 2002) suggested that all at some point had fabricated the classroom events. They had wanted to please their instructors with fancy story telling to get a good grade, and had built a fantasized world that was made operational through a sort of vocal day-dreaming, creative thinking aloud in the methods classes. When asked to reflect on their experiences they had made up case reports that seemed to them more interesting and true to life. Their logs deliberately conveyed false images of them, the images they believe their supervisors wanted to see. Furthermore, with time they seemed to believe in their made up identities, which they were obliged to play out to the end. That may be part of commercials based identity now, especially for young people: you start believing in the image that you advertise about yourself to people.

North American culture is particular in the sense that sharing is almost a social requirement. The culture of niceness is such that people seem to develop multiple selves to match types of situational agreements. In a teacher education setting, student teachers share their experiences and develop a new persona. Since American students in higher education settings have been educated to consider themselves as winners, their aspiration to leadership backed by omnipresent evaluations paradoxically leads them quite naturally to create heroic characters and fantastic events for a while. In a way, their educational catharsis could be considered a form of reconceptualization of the self. Fragile selves are reshaped and given thrust and boldness. Face-threatening events shake arrogant personalities who had never really been challenged by life experiences. There is a reality test here for student teachers, and the first attempt to save face would be to re-construe the dreamworld that has vanished. It is good that instructors be aware of these subtle processes to some psychological depth. Non-indigenous readers and outsiders cannot really understand this unique phenomenon. They should grasp the American Dream cultural framework that situates many members of the middle and upper class in a race for success. In this cultural metaphor, life is a game that tests your ability to win. Autonomy is guided by the rules of the game. Metaphorically, to be an American is to be a winner. You may win anything: the important thing is that you win (preferably what you win should have economical value). What is so difficult for participants in the race for winning is that if you don't win, you lose. You can't be a loser in American society. Losers are invisibilized, erased. There is no authorized expression for losers. Losers can only express themselves in reframing their loss into a new winning situation. If you interviewed some possible losers, they might find ways to demonstrate that you misinterpreted their situation—and they'll win at that. Teacher education is shaped as well within the winner-loser metaphorical duality and international readers should acknowledge that in such circumstance it is simply not possible for an American educated person to lose. That might be the reason why some student teachers happen to be so voiceful at the end of semesters when the grades are given and need much help and caring attitude. This is part of the education context, hence the constant emphasis on students needing to know the rules of the game in advance. They often feel totally insecure if their autonomy is not framed by clear, expressed rules.

3. POSSIBLE WAYS OUT OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PARADOXES

Like other educators, world language educators are supposed to work hard to reach and maintain high standards while the standards system itself seems to have been created as a political, and a partly illusory discourse. The application of competency standards is time consuming in such a way that it cannot be properly achieved. Moreover the indispensable resources that the most basic educational goals would deserve are not provided. Lacking funding, resources, political support and teachers, world language teaching is threatened to disappear from K-12 schools. In this context, is there hypocrisy in continuing business as usual when we notice that:

* The means are not provided to reach the ends that are required. Languages are taught in schools in a way that is less than satisfactory in terms of schedule, curriculum, variety, methods, efficiency, cultural impact, identities, and recognition. Children need life-related contents to manifest deep, long-term learning. They need to be in smaller groups, start to learn languages younger.
* We are in a time of ideology-based, quasi-religious hyper rationality. The foreign language standards (5Cs) offer an interesting framework, still may prevent larger, freer project-based approaches that would support a deeper understanding of cultures and of Otherness. Intuition and subjectivity are proscribed in the cult of technoscience. Yet there is no such thing as value-free methods: all rely upon implicit, sociopolitical stands.
* The whole craze for change occurs in an economically fabricated warfare context[1]. While languages are and should be a unique entry into world peace, they become the main instruments for colonial snooping. Neo-imperialism uses the most counterintuitive instruments: force, intimidation and corruption rather than knowledge, reliability and accountability. It represses opposition and imposes obedience through decrees and statutory orders rather than creating harmony through consensual negotiation. It was thought that it would be possible to communicate with China without Chinese, to forcefully persuade South American allies without any recognition for their languages and cultures. The results are at the opposite of expectations. The most spoken languages are not taught nor valued, and the current language policies are at best characterized as «shooting themselves in the foot» (Lee & Marshall, 2001) and as «shortsighted, counterproductive, even paranoid» (Stanton, 2005: 5). Overall the logic of short-term efficiency negates proficiency, professionalism, diplomacy, and intelligence.

Are we doing a good job in perpetuating reductionist views that transform languages and cultures into prepacked, frozen chunks of knowledge that fit what a dehumanizing economic system can promote? Shouldn't there be some awareness rising in the process? Are there

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1. Due to the increased requirements for electronic accountability, the teacher education system seems to race out of control and—to get up to speed—students need to sacrifice their balance, their health and go heavily in debt. Many are bound to the economic banking system up to twenty years if you include grace periods, deferments, debt consolidations and refinancing of their loans without any chance to ending this nightmare with personal bankruptcy.

solutions to these dilemmas? How can we and should we reconceptualize this discipline? It is always risky to propose solutions. Many may sound naive. However without reflection on the possible solutions, deconstruction and critical heuristics are sterile. Therefore I have derived from the contradictions analyzed a series of recommendations for FLE:

1) *Conjugating national priority with the current national neglect for Foreign Language Education.* FLE is a top priority for many professions but it is neglected in U.S. K-12 schools. Experienced language educators know that you cannot understand a language without having a good grasp of its culture because of crosscultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 1999). Thus any short-term solution will be a bad fit. Decision-makers may know about it but may not want to invest money in the long term. We need some serious convincing about it. Our focus should be to bring to the fore a thorough approach to languages and cultures from early childhood education. Learning a second language early will help learning a third language later. Regarding the neglect of Chinese — the most widely spoken and one of the less-commonly taught languages — there are different issues at stake. The first issue is creating a new culture that values language pedagogy in Literature Departments and increasing collabor-ation across Schools (MLA, 2007). It would allow us to gather some potential to fund cross-departmental positions. It is only in gathering interest in the many «smaller» language areas for education as a field where they can expand their niche, audience, and outreach that we can build a new and broader approach to language teacher education.

2) *Top-down innovation with such drastic improvements that programs are in shambles.* As Lakoff (2002) suggests, every effort should be made to gently bring the decision-makers who have an 'authoritative father', monological mindset—a form of hypocognition of their social role—to a more nurturing role. Second, it is imperative to stabilize reforms to a more reasonable pace, provide 'after-sale' support and opportunities for local, bottom-up adaptation. Third, to make life more humane, we need to work on identity, power for social healing, and the politics of the personal. Is it possible to rethink the topic of efficacy and give it a humane dimension? The teacher is but one pawn within this hyper capitalist chess game where all life is a paid-for experience (Rifkin, 2001). When problems arise, they are fixed by specialists as you would fix an engine, leading to a view that lacks wholeness and induces dependency towards consumerist solutions. The traditional way of looking at teaching as a profession was to separate it from the personal. Dehistoricizing the teacher has for long been the trend. Personal history had not much importance and ought not to interfere in the teaching process. Now we have come to the awareness that identity is in action. Splitting the personal from the professional is rather unhealthy if you want genuine bond with students: that type of rapport based on trust that is lacking in current society. Western society partly prevents true connection with the children. Children cannot be touched, they are crowded in large groups, they are taught a technical approach to reality and their interactions are engineered towards productivity and machines: computers, not people. We need to reverse the trend that leads to robotizing human society. Many educators and researchers believe that the role of the teachers should change. They should become transformative intellectuals and critical pedagogists. With the goal of awareness catching, the teacher becomes active as a social healer (Tochon, 2004). A number of scholars have developed such a conceptualization inspired by the translation of Freire's works (1970 and 1998; see also Araújo Freire & Macedo, 2000; McLaren, 2006) in

the field of languages, such as Tellefson (1995), Benesch (2001), Pennycook (2001), Reagan (2005a), Osborn (2005) and Motha (2006)[2]. Basically the teacher's knowledge and experience need to be valued and recognized.

3) *Teaching methods without epistemology, communicating without contents*. Teaching a language goes through a legitimating crisis. We need to reconceptual-ize what we mean by being proficient in a second language situation, teaching the language of others, explaining otherness and the culture of other peoples. Methods need to be socially situated (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The concept of methods is changing with a better understanding of its link to epistemology (Lakatos, Feyerabend & Motterlini, 2000). In «Beyond Methods» Macrostrategies for Language Teaching», Kumaravadivelu (2003) emphasizes the need for conceptualizing teaching acts, contextualizing linguistic input and raising cultural consciousness. He stresses language skills integration, social relevance and negotiated interaction as well as intuitive heuristics and postmethod pedagogy. Reflective strategies are but a first step in the move towards a deeper approach to language teaching. The second step is to recognizing the politics of pedagogy: that the classroom is a politicized space (Pennycook, 2001). Its tensions and contradictions character-ize teaching and explain the teacher's eclecticism. The socially situated teacher invites students to take stands vis-à-vis knowledge and cultures, discourses and power. Involving participants and experiences from indigenous as well as intern-ational communities can be as important as choosing the right interactional structures to frame classroom exchanges. What is the legitimacy of teaching strategies and cultural generalizations *in abstracto*? There is no clear window into the moving dynamics of cultures. Cultures are socially layered. Any gaze at the culture of others is filtered through epistemic lenses imbued of language, race, ethnicity, class and gender. As well the typical outsider look at otherness tends to ignore subtle differences within the target culture and language.

Teaching self and otherness is part of teaching cultures and languages. Accessing another culture is an identity building process. Interactions need to be biographically situated. Beliefs about ontology and reality as well as social positioning play a huge role in the perception and stands vis-à-vis the other language and culture. Thus methods should become more embodied and personal, and lead to a reflection on one's potentially discriminatory identity processes. The search for a grand cultural narrative and its prototypes — somewhat stereotypical — should be replaced by local, small-scale attempts at developing projects fitted to specific experiences and goals. We should change the way we conceive of language teaching. World language classes should be critical in learning the world and oneself. Dealing with cultures equates dealing with identity processes and entering a dialogue with otherness (Tracy, 2002). Languages are related with crucial issues that young people know quite well, like naming and labeling, discriminating, disempowering, categorizing, stage setting, discursive sexing, internet searching, arguing and persuading, group belonging, achieving and reconceptualizing (Thomas & Wareing, 1999). Students should be actively involved in learning. They should be provided

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2. Reagan (2005b) notes that a large section of «Pedagogy of the Oppressed» (Freire, 1970) on the role of spirituality has been censored, which tells much on the sanitization of foreign works. So much for «cultural untranslatability» (Budick, 2000). Moreover in the English version of Freire's book, the only excerpt in French —a quote from Sartre—has been recreated from English and is syntactically wrong and meaningless.

with examples as they build a metacognitive awareness of these aspects. We have to rethink language teaching within an interdisciplinary framework, expanding on the 'Connections' 'C' of the ACTFL (1996) standards. In a time when languages are shrinking in school curricula, we might have no other solution than becoming the vehicle to interdisciplinary, content-based learning. World languages could reinforce the goals of the general curriculum rather than being intruder disciplines in an overloaded schedule.

4) *Teaching of other cultures is sanitized in depoliticized and stereotyped formats: we professionalize language student teachers who do not understand their own cultural identity, foreignness and otherness*. Foreign Language Education ought to add depth to the concept of reflective practice (Schön, 1987), blending critical awareness with professional growth. Language teachers should take a stand vis-à-vis their own cultural practices. Their ethnocentrism ought to evolve toward cultural relativism. The way they teach reveals their own cultural pragmatics. This invisible positioning contributes to reinforce specific cultural ideologies. Thus the Foucaultian concept of «colonization of the mind» should be understood in practice (Scheurich & Bell McKenzie, 2005). Teaching a language is not a matter of grammar. Part of it is related with a clash of identities. There should be a focus on culturally situated meanings. Indeed research has shown that the focus on form is not sufficient since poor topic cohesion affects comprehension (Toth, 2004).

A deeper level of reflection on practice would influence positively who is teaching, how cultural contents are processed, and the framework for how the discipline is being taught. The broadening of FLE as a discipline might impact other disciplines as well. The first important step is to help students reflecting on their own culture. The second step is to provide for them opportunities to get involved with other cultures. They need prolonged and repeated immersion experiences, week- and month-stays where the language is used in authentic life situations. It should be a systematic experience in both K-12 and college-level language studies. This is but one major, deep way for students to frequent the target language and feel at home within the other culture. Topics like cultural equality, rationales for the fear or acceptation of difference, communication across cultures, the advantages of national multiculturalism should be addressed. Collaboration with bilingual programs should be systematic. Also immersion could be lived on-site with the help of local bilinguals. Why not organizing home stay with local families who speak the language at home? Language and culture networks could be created.

5) *Enforcing others' reflection and guiding student teachers' autonomy*. Students may create fictions of themselves when reflective self-reports are graded. The positive side is that, behind social masks and fictions students acquire professional self-confidence. However guided autonomy and enforced reflection—as well as evaluating genuineness—create a situation in which the student's self is another. There are solutions to this problem. European pedagogical institutes for instance have for long been extremely sensitive to the «double hat» effect: it is detrimental to education to have the instructor wearing the hat of the evaluator while being the said facilitator as well. This situation «enforces» facilitation. Some educational institutions have decided not to grade reflective activities. You cannot be forced to be true to others nor publicize your privacy. Providing a series of optional workshops for which grades would be related to workshop presence only would make a difference. In teacher education there should at least be some search for authenticity.

4. IN GUISE OF CONCLUSION

In this article I have indicated that the position of program head at a University where many languages are being taught presents numerous challenges, mainly because of contradict-ions that the field needs to address and resolve. I have tried to transcend the somewhat depressing acknowledgement of inherent paradoxes on which my deconstruction of experiences shed crude light. Reflecting on these issues led me to envision a series of possible solutions. Critical System Heuristics provide their own problem solving tools. One of them is to find ways to reintroduce dialogue and integrate opposition. Recognizing, understanding, teaching and valuing difference is a key issue in this discipline. Good will is not enough. Courage is needed to tell decision-makers loudly when their short-term focus is detrimental to generations of children. The situation is so bad that it may prevent the decision-makers themselves to reach what they claim to be their goals. Deliberate ignorance of other cultures has isolated the U.S. and its status seems changing worldwide. Inappropriate foreign policies may create a boomerang effect. The United States seem to be loosing their voice in the community of nations. At a time when we face rapid world changes and a radicalization of discourse such that diplomacy seems part of history, Foreign Language Education can bring a new mindset. It is the basis for real dialogue. That is why it is such a crucial discipline.

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