

Learning to Understand: The Role of Language
Education in Bridging the Gap between Multiculturalism
and Cosmopolitanism

by

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Introduction

As an American student traveling abroad, I encountered many examples of situations in which Americans fell short of their peers, especially in situations relating to foreign language education. I also noticed, as a student and as a traveler, the positive reaction I would receive upon telling someone that I was, in fact, a student of *their* language. I've always been compelled to learn language, and over the years, I've learned a great deal of Spanish as well as bits and pieces of German, French, and Maya. This thesis is one attempt to pinpoint what it is about language, and specifically language education, which has value not only to me as an individual but also to us as a society.

It is not difficult to recognize the value of education, both on an individual and a societal level. At first glance, it is apparent that the choices that we make regarding education affect how children and people of all ages learn to think and learn, and the type of knowledge on which they place value. Not only that, but education guides the skills that we develop, the goals that we set for ourselves, and the expectations we have of others. Educational policies and decisions also have a heavy influence on the opportunities and experiences that students go on to have.

In all of these examples, education is something that could be studied effectively within the boundaries of psychology or through anthropological and sociological ethnographies and studies. Indeed, extensive work has been done in these fields concerning issues of educational policy, practice, and theory. This work is both academically interesting and admirable. However, I wanted to consider the value of

education not only an as interesting and important topic, but also as a philosophical one.

Not only is education essential to individual, social, and cultural development, but the value of education is important to consider from a philosophical perspective. Education is important specifically as a philosophical topic because how we are educated is indicative how we view the role of education itself, and of how it informs our identities and our perceptions of the identities of others. Education must be studied in a philosophical realm because it is in this way that we can answer not only the questions “what does education do?” and “what can education do?” but also “what should education do” and therefore “how should we go about educating?” The study of education can be deeper and more thorough with this kind of philosophical perspective.

In this project, I concern myself with one particular type of education. I’ve attempted to pinpoint the components of education that most influence the way in which we interact. Though this is a philosophy thesis, it is important to me that the conclusions I draw are applicable not only in a philosophical realm, but also in the context of other fields. By focusing on an aspect of education that concerns how we communicate, I both have chosen a topic that is fundamentally philosophical, and one that is relevant in the world today.

The issue of cultural and language education in particular is relevant in many contexts, both internationally and locally. Issues of immigration and linguistic diversity are often introduced into debates related to questions of national identity.

Likewise, the issue of how to educate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds is central to addressing these same domestic concerns. Language education is similarly vital to maintaining positive international relations. In fact, a task report from the Council on Foreign Relations cites the fact that 8 of 10 Americans speak only English as evidence of the threat that lack of education poses to United States national security.¹ Not only does this pose a threat to national security, but improving upon this situation through language education would be one component of improving both local relationships in diverse settings and diplomatic relationships on an international level.

In the following four chapters I will present an account of the importance of language education. In chapter one, I begin by considering two major and often conflicting theories of culture -- cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. We need to consider these two theories before specifically focusing on the issue of language education. My discussion of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism and of the importance of intercultural understanding creates a framework that sets the stage for a later discussion of language education. I argue that the two theories are not as conflicting as they at first appear, and conclude that there might be a way to reconcile the best parts of each of these views. In the second chapter, I consider the role of understanding in our interpersonal and intercultural interactions, and discuss why understanding is an often overlooked yet essential moral skill. In chapter three, I focus on language itself, and why it is essential to understanding. Finally, in chapter four, I bring these elements together, and discuss the importance of language

¹ Joel I. Klein, Condoleezza Rice, Julia Levy, U.S. Education Reform and National Security: Task Force Report No.68 (Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2012)

education in building the kind of understanding that I described in the second chapter. Through education, and through the understanding that it can produce, I conclude that we can find a view of culture that lends itself readily to the idea of understanding and allows for a positive and cooperative conception of cultural differences.

Chapter 1

Multiculturalism and Cosmopolitanism

My goal in beginning with an analysis of two different perspectives of culture is to develop an objective towards which cultural education can strive. I start this thesis under the assumption that some form of education ought to guide students in making their interactions with others, especially others with different cultural roots, as constructive as possible. However, even with this assumption in mind, there is a wide variety of possibilities of how culture ought to be approached in the classroom. Beginning by looking at different views of culture itself grounds and directs my study of how education should approach culture. Just as any study of scientific education or ethical education would have to begin with a focus on science or ethics itself, so too must a study of cultural education begin with a closer look at the concept of culture.

In order to try to develop the best and most effective way of approaching culture and language in the classroom, we need to clarify our understanding of culture. The way that culture and diversity are presented can have a profound effect on how people, and especially young people, view their own identities and the identities of others. If we want to present the idea of culture in the way that is most beneficial, we need to be clear about our own goals regarding culture, identity, and perception of culture. The first step to producing a practically helpful and appropriate approach to cultural education is to develop a similarly advantageous and sound view of culture itself.

There are three crucial questions that need to be raised in order to establish a view of cultural diversity and exchange. First of all, what is culture, anyway? How can we attempt to develop an effective approach to cultural education without an understanding of what culture is? Decisions about the best or most useful approach to cultural education must be based on a solid definition of the term “culture.”

Secondly, any definition of culture defines something that applies to a group of people. Who is included in a cultural group? What does group membership entail? This question of *who* is part of a particular culture, or, to look at it the other way around, *with whom* an individual identifies, is central to the theories of culture that we will be considering.

Finally, once we establish a view of what culture is and who is included in a particular cultural group, it is necessary to ask another essential question about the value of culture itself. What good is culture? What attitude should we adopt towards the various elements of culture? How should we approach the inevitable effect that culture has on us? These questions do not merely address whether culture is “good” but how we ought to approach the different elements of culture, and what role we ought to allow it to play. Any theory of culture must address these questions.

Looking at commonly referenced thought on the topic of culture, our attention is likely to turn to Sir Edward Burnett Tylor’s definition of the term. Culture, according to Tylor, is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of

society.”² This is helpful in that it explains what elements of an individual’s life can be referred to as “cultural.” However, when considering cases in which we must determine with which culture a person identifies, what we need to know is just that: with *which* culture. From this perspective we can see that the more challenging and more important question is not “what aspects of life can be included under the umbrella of ‘culture?’” but rather, “where can we or should we define the boundaries between distinct cultures?” This definition of culture grants us is not so much a way of understanding what culture is, but a way of understanding on what guidelines to determine when cultures differ.

Perhaps even more important is the mere knowledge that, in the context of the particular cultural theories we will consider, we ought to be keeping our eyes out for distinctions *between* cultures rather than simply markers *of* culture. In other words, when looking at and comparing different theories of culture, we ought to assess their advantages and disadvantages based not only on how they address culture itself, but on how they address difference. In an educational context, this recognition ensures that cultural education will focus on interactions between cultures, an approach that I think will be most conducive to teaching students how best to approach these interactions. Understanding this also means that on an individual level, when confronted with unfamiliar situations and people of diverse backgrounds, we will know that any observations we make are in fact made within the framework of our own culture, rather than independently of it.

² Edward Burnett Tylor, The Origins of Culture, (USA: Harper & Row, 1958) 1.

In order to best approach this issue of distinction between culture and intercultural interaction, I want to consider two predominant theories of culture and identity. The theories considered here address the final two questions that I've brought up – 'with whom do we identify,' and 'what value can we, or should we, place on culture?' As we'll see, these two questions are highly interdependent. Whether or not we identify with particular individuals or with a particular "culture" has a profound effect on what value we place on those people and customs. Similarly, the value that we place or fail to place on culture has a profound effect on whether or not we identify strongly with those who share that culture. A theory of culture serves to help define the ways in which we view our own identities and the identities of others, to explain how we form groups and what group membership entails, and to provide a basis for several different areas of study. It affects and is affected by how we view the world philosophically, sociologically, and politically. Finally, a theory of culture creates a normative model for human interaction.

Prominent among these models are views based on the idea of multiculturalism, which emphasize the differences of experience that come with different cultural backgrounds and promote the importance of "group-differentiated rights,"³ and views based on the ideals of cosmopolitanism, which see culture as fluid, and see individuals, rather than groups, as those who have rights and responsibilities. As we will see, these two theories of culture differ in how they describe individual and group identity. They also differ in what they see as the ideal way of forming our own view of our identities, and what they see as the ideal way in which to approach

³ Sarah Song, "Multiculturalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/multiculturalism/>>

interactions with others. These two views are often in conflict, despite both having an agenda that supports cultural and ethnic equality and justice.

I hope to find a way to bridge the differences between these views through the means of communication and understanding, and, specifically, through a focus on language education. The first step in this process is to look at cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism as inspiration for how we might approach intercultural interaction. I will argue that what these two views have in common—specifically, the way in which they approach difference—is also what sets them apart. I aim to identify a more favorable view of difference, and in doing so, pinpoint the ethical skills that can aid us in approaching intercultural differences. By finding an alternative way to view difference, we can reshape these two theories of morality and culture and adopt a view that draws on the best elements of each.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism seeks to acknowledge and promote cultural diversity through the recognition of the identities and rights of different cultural groups. From a multicultural perspective, it is only through the acknowledgement of cultural characteristics that groups and individuals can be treated justly; tolerating differences purely on the level of the individual is not sufficient for creating a society in which everyone is given “equal” opportunities. In other words, any plan that aims for equal treatment of individuals must account for differences in experience and circumstance between those individuals. In this way, individuals need to be treated as members of separate, specifically cultural, communities. Multiculturalism is based on the idea that

a group with a shared cultural identity has a shared set of experiences that affect its group identity and the identities of the members of that group.⁴

One of the main ways in which this theoretical perspective manifests itself is through issues surrounding political rights and recognition. In a multiculturalist view, rights granted on an individual basis do not adequately acknowledge the role that a cultural differences play in shaping us as individuals. Instead of merely treating people as individuals, we must respect the importance of groups that have a shared identity and the rights that people have as members of these groups.⁵

The multicultural perspective is often linked with a political approach that has come to be known as “identity politics.” The term “identity politics” refers to a wide spectrum of movements that promote the recognition of groups defined by a particular shared identity. Those in favor of this approach to culture and equality take the view that people from different cultural groups possess different experiences and ways of perceiving the world that give them different needs which must in turn be satisfied by different treatment. This different treatment could manifest itself in terms of group rights—rights held by a group of people collectively rather than by individuals—or group-differentiated rights—rights held by certain groups or members of certain groups but not by others.⁶

Not all groups of this nature are based on an ethnic or cultural identity. Groups of disabled individuals, for instance, are vocal in demanding changes in both political

⁴ Song

⁵ Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/identity-politics/>>.

⁶ Peter Jones, "Cultures, Group Rights, and Group-Differentiated Rights," *Multiculturalism and Moral Conflict*, Ed. Maria Dimova-Cookson and Peter M.R. Stirk. (New York: Routledge, 2010) 39-40.

discourse that addresses disability and rights to accessible public spaces and services.⁷ Transgendered activists, similarly, use identity politics to advocate for legislation concerning gender and gender expression.⁸ Still, cultural and linguistic identity is the main uniting factor in groups that seek out group differentiated rights. Identity politics have played a major role in issues such as the demands of the Quebecois that Canada embrace the country's dual identity, allow them control over immigration to Quebec, and support the predominance of the French language.⁹ They also come into play in the right of, say, Muslim individuals to take time off for prayer,¹⁰ or, as we'll see, the rights of indigenous groups to educate their children in their native language.

In this view, treating people "equally" is not the same as treating them identically. For instance, linguistic minority groups need to be granted certain rights and independence as group entities. It would not be enough to allow for people to speak their native language and favor it in their own activities; they need to be granted access to resources and facilities that use the language in question. Multiculturalism and identity politics are both grounded in the idea that our roles in society are shaped by the identity groups of which we are members. Especially when there is a dynamic of oppression or dominance, the cultural identities that define us are fundamental to our individual identities and not to be ignored.

⁷ William Roth, "Politics and the Disabled Body: Diverse Thoughts About Human Diversity," The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Identity Politics in Twenty-First Century America, Ed. David F. Ericson (New York: Routledge, 2011) 154-155

⁸ Jenna Basiliere, "Outside the Binary: Transgendered Politics on a Global Stage," The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Identity Politics in Twenty-First Century America, Ed. David F. Ericson, (New York: Routledge, 2011) 138-140.

⁹ Bhikhu Parekh, Rethinking Multiculturalism (Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000) 185-186.

¹⁰ Parekh 216

This way of viewing culture shapes our approach to other aspects of life as well, especially education. Even when considering people individually, we must take into account the ways in which a given individual is affected by membership in a particular group. We cannot, for instance, teach the writing of an African American woman to a high school class without acknowledging and discussing the ways in which her race and gender might have affected her writing.

This is something that theorists like bell hooks focus on in the study of education. While she sees the inclusion of writers and thinkers from diverse backgrounds as important to any curriculum, she thinks it essential that this work not be viewed in a “colorblind” fashion. We need to face issues of prejudice, racism, sexism, and culture head on by taking the effects of these things into account in our consideration of the works that they undoubtedly influenced.¹¹ In this way, we can only truly understand this work in context and give these authors and artists fair consideration in the classroom by paying attention specifically to their differences. Just as we can only understand a person’s work by considering how her culture and social position has affected her, we must take this context into account when considering a person’s rights and needs in society.

Some critics argue that multicultural education and philosophy lead to the degradation of patriotic values as a result of the inclusion of many outside cultures and traditions. In his book *The Disuniting of America* Arthur M. Schlesinger accuses multiculturalism of subscribing to something that he refers to as the “cult of

¹¹ bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, (New York: Routledge, 1994)

ethnicity.” In his words, “The attack on the common American identity is the culmination of the cult of ethnicity.”¹² Critics such as Schlesinger often see multiculturalism in education as particularly pressing because of the role of the classroom in forming shared notions of American identity and addressing the role of ethnic minority and immigrant groups. If we give different identity groups this kind of role, especially this kind of role in the classroom, we risk losing the identity and traditions that we share as Americans.

I would argue, as would many multiculturalists as well as those who criticize multiculturalism from other perspectives, that this particular criticism of the multicultural viewpoint sets the precedent for an uneven and unjust balance of power between those in dominant cultural groups and those who are members of minority cultural groups. These critics frame their arguments as favoring unity over separation. However, the unified identity is nearly always that of the majority group, and this view of American society rejects any emphasis on distinct cultural traditions. These critics neglect to acknowledge how such a view has the potential to ignore the traditions of minority ethnic groups, and thus exclude members of these groups.

The problem with insisting that we must preserve, for example, traditional American culture, is that valuing this above the wellbeing of individual Americans places those who do not, for instance, speak English as a first language, at a disadvantage. Even though the multiculturalist view seeks to concern itself not only with individuals but also with groups, it is still ultimately concerned with the

¹² Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 1998) 125.

wellbeing of individuals. In the most favorable light, this objection maintains that the most beneficial thing for members of minority groups is full integration into a dominant society. However, this criticism of multiculturalism places so much focus on the importance of a unified national identity that it neglects to place adequate importance on the wellbeing of individuals from minority or immigrant cultural groups.

Although I am not entirely in agreement with the multicultural viewpoint, I do agree that it is more important to place a high value on people than it is to place a high value on the continued dominance of a particular culture. This does not automatically imply that culture is not important; even if we do not acknowledge that culture has any value in its own right, culture could still be important tangentially for the sake of the people it affects. In this way, culture is secondary; even if we consider it a good, it is a good in that it may be owed to the people who value it, not in that it has moral standing in its own right. While members of a culture, and indeed a cultural group, are deserving of this kind of moral consideration, the elements of culture that exist separately from the thinking, breathing individuals who create and are affected by it are not. The fundamental question that we need to address here, then, is how we ought to go about approaching culture in a way that is most favorable to the people in question. In this way, I think that we can't reject the multicultural view offhand simply because it fails to preserve the dominance of any particular culture.

But, even if we reject this particular objection to multiculturalism, there are other prominent criticisms that must be taken into account. Other critics of multiculturalism point out that the multicultural view is too strongly based on those who are alike

joining together, to the exclusion of others. The idea that people ought to band together on the basis of cultural or ethnic sameness is detrimental to equality rather than helpful.¹³ Multiculturalism, they say, draws arbitrary and detrimental lines between people on the basis of cultural origin. This approach both fails to recognize the cultural complexity of individuals, and creates unnecessary separation between people. James Donald explains this objection succinctly: “The problem with this [multiculturalist] approach, of course, is that cultures exist as cultures in this sense only by drawing boundaries around themselves to create the set of differences that specifies their unique self-identity.”¹⁴ In other words, a commitment to multiculturalism can lead us to define our own culture artificially by its difference with other cultures.

In addition, this approach that seems to promote separation makes it difficult to produce care or concern for others who are outside of the cultural boundaries that we construct. Donald continues, stating that “...the flowering of the germ of identification with family and immediate community into a love for wider circles of humanity is often hard to see.”¹⁵ How can we come to love, or at least treat with concern, those who are so different from us if we are so committed to defining and allying ourselves primarily with our own cultural groups?

These critics look for an alternative that promotes a view of the world that does not distinguish between different social, ethnic, and cultural groups on moral grounds.

¹³ Heyes

¹⁴ James Donald, "Internationalisation, Diversity and the Humanities Curriculum: Cosmopolitanism and Multiculturalism Revisited," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41.3 (2007): 3.

¹⁵ Donald 3

This critique differs from previous criticism that we discussed in that, like multiculturalism, it specifically seeks to promote and reinforce the rights and wellbeing of those from non-dominant cultural groups. It criticizes multiculturalism for taking a counterproductive approach to linguistic, ethnic, and cultural difference. By encouraging people to be first and foremost loyal to their own cultural groups, multiculturalism fails to encourage us to place adequate value on humanity as a whole and on individuals who are distant from us. One alternative view, known as cosmopolitanism, encourages us to "...work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, base our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the circle that defines our humanity special attention and concern."¹⁶

Cosmopolitanism

The cosmopolitan view maintains that individual identity is affected and influenced by all the different cultural and social situations with which a particular individual has come in contact. Central to this view is a focus on individual identity rather than group identity. Cosmopolitanism, like multiculturalism, has political, social, and philosophical components, and has implications for the perception of identity and of group membership. Philosophers and social scientists like Martha Nussbaum and K. Anthony Appiah, as well as some education theorists, view multiculturalism as a force that will encourage us to separate ourselves from those who are not part of our immediate social framework.

¹⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism, Ed. Martha C. Nussbaum (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 9.

The central ideal of cosmopolitanism goes back to the term “citizen of the world,” coined by Diogenes. Being a citizen of the world involves a commitment to and concern for a sphere of the population that extends beyond family, local community, and state. An individual’s sphere of concern can be visually represented by a series of concentric circles. The individual is at the center, surrounded by a tight circle of family and close friends. The circles around this represent the individual’s local community, their national community, and, finally, the world community. With respect to this framework, the goals of cosmopolitanism are to bring the metaphorical external circles in towards the center, and make them a more central part of the individuals’ scope of concern.¹⁷ In this way, the ideal is to ally ourselves not with any particular cultural group but, rather, with the global human community.

Advocates of cosmopolitanism present this view as a sort of rejection of nationalism and patriotism. They assert that by seeing the world (and teaching the world) from a cosmopolitan perspective, we can get rid of the biases that come with living and favoring a way of life that is associated with a particular culture or nation. According to the cosmopolitan view, patriotism and nationalism don’t bring us together, but, rather, divide us. This is true not only of the kind of patriotism that exists among members of the same dominant cultural group, but also of the multicultural attitude that members of smaller ethnic or linguistic minority or immigrant, or groups should remain in some way “true to” their culture or heritage.

This does not mean that cosmopolitan thinkers are looking to suggest that anyone ought to assimilate or in any way attempt to blend in with a dominant culture.

¹⁷ Nussbaum 3-17

On the contrary, they are merely trying to suggest that each person—whether or not he or she appears to belong primarily to a dominant group—is not merely a representative of a group but an individual who can be defined in association with many different groups, and likewise must express concern for many different groups. Not only should we act as though we are interconnected in order to treat everyone respectfully, we are and always have been interconnected. As Appiah states “In every region of the world, throughout recorded history, men and women have traveled great distances...shaping the minds and the material lives of people in other regions with objects and ideas from far away.”¹⁸ Appiah continues to explain how this interconnectedness continues today. The plurality of culture that affects us as individuals mirrors the ways in which cultures have interacted throughout history.

The cosmopolitan view of identity has implications not only for our sense of self, but for the way in which we, as individuals, perceive the rest of the world. This perception can, in turn, influence the kind of moral weight that we place on different individuals. One cosmopolitan critique of the multicultural viewpoint is that multiculturalism encourages us to place an unfairly high value on those people with whom we share a group identity. Cosmopolitan thinkers suggest that we should deny that we are *exclusively* members of any one particular cultural group, and thereby make ourselves more able to emphasize with and care about those that, from a multicultural perspective, would be part of a different group. The cosmopolitan solution to this issue is to dispense with the idea that certain others are more “like” us in this fundamental and highly structured way. As we’ll see, this is one of the aspects

¹⁸ K. Anthony Appiah, The Ethics of Identity, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 215.

of cosmopolitanism that I will question. Why must we deny our differences from others in order to show them respect, empathy, and care? I think that through the development of ethical skills such as understanding, which I will discuss in chapter two, we can make care and understanding compatible with personal and cultural difference.

As we can see, cosmopolitanism, like multiculturalism, has a strong normative element. With this in mind, the cosmopolitan view of identity is not only a description, but an ethical judgment. The “cosmopolitan man,” someone whose values and daily customs are influenced by association with many different sources, someone who falls into many categories just as he defies categorization, is an ideal to be strived for. In turn, this promotes the view that our judgments and decisions should be based on a global framework rather than a local or cultural one. This means that the ideal cosmopolitan person ought to both consider and take into account values from various parts of the world and his or her own experience, and feel moral concern for and ethical obligation towards people from many different backgrounds.

In a certain sense, the most extreme cosmopolitan view of the world can be seen as an attempt to rid us of the idea of distinct cultures altogether. However, some cosmopolitan theorists see this as a criticism of cosmopolitanism. They aim to clarify that cosmopolitanism is not a rejection of culture so much as a recognition of the primary importance of the humanity that we share and of the plurality of culture even within each individual human being. As Martha Nussbaum explains, people “...may continue to regard themselves as defined partly by their particular loves—their families, their religious, ethnic, or racial communities, or even their country. But they

must also, and centrally, learn to recognize humanity wherever they encounter it...and be eager to understand humanity in all its strange guises.”¹⁹

We are not merely members of specific subcategories of the human race, but individuals who fall into a multitude of possible categories. The cosmopolitan view seeks to acknowledge the numerous facets of any individual’s identity. In this way, we can respect a person as an individual, conscious, moral agent, transcending the influences of any group of which that individual may happen to be a member. In this way we can also seek to form connections even with those who do not fall into the same single category that we do. Since no one is exclusively part of a single category, it becomes easier to identify and focus on similarities that we have with a wide variety of individuals. Thus, we do not limit ourselves to associating with those who are part of our primary cultural group, since the whole idea of identifying exclusively with one particular cultural group goes against the fundamentals of cosmopolitanism.

Those in favor of multiculturalism and identity politics find fault with the idea of cosmopolitanism in several different ways. The cosmopolitan view criticizes the natures of patriotism and nationalism, seeing these things as exclusive, biased, and favoring particular (and often dominant) cultural or ethnic viewpoints. However, those who argue for multiculturalism do not see their view as biased or unequal. Rather, through multiculturalism, they seek to promote equality. The main thing that sets this apart from a cosmopolitan view is the emphasis on the differences that exist between different cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups. From a multicultural

¹⁹ Nussbaum 9

perspective, the most just way to approach the situation is to acknowledge these differences fully.

According to a multiculturalist, granting individual rights is not sufficient to create equality, as it effectively ignores significant differences between different groups and the rights that members of those groups therefore require. It is important to focus on and acknowledge the ways in which membership in a particular group can affect an individual's outlook and experience. People who live and have been raised in different contexts necessarily have different sets of experience, and those differences must be honored and recognized in order to reach any kind of social equality.

From this perspective, simply ignoring these differences and treating each individual "equally" with no regard to their cultural origin is not in fact equal: it disregards important differences in experience which lead to different needs. Attempting to transcend these differences would not even out the playing field, as supporters of the cosmopolitan view claim, but in fact make the field even more uneven by forcing us to forget the differences that accounted for the inequality in the first place. Maintaining this kind of equality is of the utmost importance, even at the expense of creating separation between different cultural or ethnic groups.

Other critics of cosmopolitanism see the emphasis on allegiance to the worldwide community of people as possibly detrimental to the idea of individual identity. Sissela Bok expresses this objection clearly in her response to Martha Nussbaum:

...There is nothing wrong with encouraging children fully to explore their most local existence in order to reach beyond it by degrees. Nor need there be anything wrong with lasting pride in, love for, or identification through particular bonds, communities, cultures. Acknowledging these need not blind one to problems within any of the circles of allegiance nor involve exceptionalism or disparagement or dismissal of others. Without learning to understand the uniqueness of cultures, beginning with one's own, it may well be impossible to honor both human distinctiveness and the shared humanity central to the cosmopolitan ideal.²⁰

Bok makes an important point here. Especially in young people, the risk of creating disdain for one's "home culture" is serious. What many may argue, however, is that this cosmopolitan argument against patriotism is not encouraging anyone to "reject" any particular culture. Rather, it is encouraging us to reject the idea of the *exclusivity* of any particular culture. In our consideration of cosmopolitanism I think that we should take criticisms like Bok's into consideration, and the idea we should try to come away with is that of accepting the existence and importance of multiple fluid points of view.

Differences or Similarities?

Although multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism have traditionally been in opposition, these two views actually share many of the same ideals. We can see this especially by noting that both of these theories are rejected by those who seek the dominance or preservation of a particular culture. However, they approach these ideals from different perspectives. Multiculturalism aims to fully acknowledge differences and emphasize the importance of rights for particular ethnic or cultural groups. Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, seeks to emphasize the similarities that

²⁰ Sissela Bok, "From Part to Whole," *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Ed. Martha C. Nussbaum (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 44.

cross linguistic, cultural, and national borders, and the ways in which individuals are affected by a multitude of cultural influences. In short, the multiculturalist view aims to resist the idea of one particular dominant culture by reinforcing the plurality of culture, while cosmopolitanism approaches this issue by reinforcing the fluidity of culture. Despite the many apparent similarities between these two theoretical perspectives, these opposing methods of approaching cultural differences have led both cosmopolitan and multicultural thinkers to focus on differences between the two views, rather than on potential points of collaboration.

I'd argue that multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are not necessarily as contradictory as they first appear. Both theories, after all, have the same basic goal in mind: to find a way of viewing culture and human interaction that is most beneficial to all involved, regardless of their cultural identity. From a practical standpoint, this means that both theories must be especially focused on supporting the best interest of those who are not a traditional part of the dominant cultural group, as it is those members of society who are most likely to be negatively affected by a harmful or inaccurate view of culture. Why can't we acknowledge and respect the differences that membership in a group creates, as identity politics does, while still accepting the possibility of transcending these differences through communication? It seems that one of the main qualms that the multicultural end of the spectrum has with cosmopolitanism is the fear that the cosmopolitan view of the world will allow for the kind of cultural domination that they have sought for so long to reject. By merging these seemingly contradictory views, perhaps we can develop a standpoint that achieves the goals of both.

We don't have to deny that membership in any particular demographic group, especially one that has been oppressed, is part of what forms an individual's identity. Nor do we have to allow ourselves to acknowledge and respect group rights over individual ones, or see individuals as merely members of a particular group. It seems that by maintaining recognition of and respect for the importance of difference, as the multicultural view does, and recognizing the complexity of identity as well as the importance respect and collaboration across borders, as the cosmopolitan view does, we can come up with a new perspective that is the best of both worlds.

The goals that each of these views is trying to reach are certainly legitimate. We do need to promote diversity, tolerance, and combat prejudice, and both sides of this debate look to do these things. So how can we go about approaching them in an effective way while avoiding getting tangled up in the controversy over culture's place in identity?

Both of these views share an underlying belief that the search for equality and justice for different cultural groups must be grounded in an analysis of the sameness or difference of members of these groups. Whatever the possible solution, the problem to be solved is always that of the cultural or experiential differences between people. It is this assumption places these two views in opposition with each other, and it is this underlying belief that I want to question.

Both multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism share a strong focus on whether individual identity is linked with or independent from group identity. They ask: What does culture have to do with identity? Where and with whom do we belong? How

does this “belonging” affect what rights we need to have, who we ought to interact with, and how much concern we ought to allot to others? We should consider the possibility that the idea of “belonging” is misguided in the first place, in that it indicates the importance of similarity between an individual and the community, group, or nation in which they belong. What distinguishes the cosmopolitan and multicultural views is a difference of opinion about the role of similarity and difference. Perhaps, then, we can get around the apparent conflict between these two views by questioning the whole notion that similarity and difference are at the base of the issue. More specifically, we can avoid this apparent dilemma by questioning the notion that similarities are what keep us, as individuals, together, and differences are what keep us apart.

So, if we consider again the idea that multiculturalism advocates for the plurality of culture while cosmopolitanism advocates for the fluidity of culture, we can conclude that there are risks that come with viewing culture in either of these ways. Focusing on the plurality of culture leaves open the possibility of separation between these groups, as well as seeming to discourage intercultural exchange and communication. On the other hand, focusing on the fluidity of culture has the potential to imply a lack of recognition of and respect for cultural differences. Still, we can get around both of these potential risks and instead focus on what we gain from each of these views by reframing the way that we view difference.

Bridging the Gap

There are several different approaches that we can take to changing this view of difference. In the following chapters, I plan to argue that instead of focusing on belonging within a community—be it a small town, nation, or the international community—we should be focusing on the role of communication, respect, and, especially, understanding. I think that a more constructive approach to a world that contains many different cultures and perspectives is to focus on our interactions as much as on our identity.

We neither have to promote a policy of assimilation, nor throw our hands up and subscribe to a kind of cultural relativism, in order to support more active understanding between individuals from a variety of different cultures. Identity is an important piece of the puzzle, yet by treating it as the only piece we end up with a conflict like the one between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism that overlooks other essential aspects that must be considered. I think that we can construct a view of culture and interaction that doesn't treat difference as necessarily a dividing force. If we can give ourselves permission to happily interact with and make an effort to understand others regardless of the differences between us, we will see that it is unnecessary to choose between strictly multicultural or cosmopolitan views at all.

This is where language education can come into play. By educating students in multiple languages, we can give them a powerful tool of communication that allows them to partially circumvent the issue of identity. While language is most certainly a central aspect of identity, speaking a language does not define and

establish identity completely. Rather, it allows for communication between people from different backgrounds, cultural or otherwise, without challenging their membership in that particular group. Language education can provide a way to bridge the gap between these two seemingly contradictory views of culture. By using a method of education that reinforces understanding across cultural divides, the differences between groups become less important. That means that we don't have to subscribe to the multicultural view that different cultural or linguistic groups are entirely separate and different, or to the cosmopolitan view that focusing on differences between groups is necessarily a bad idea. Instead, we can strive to adopt a view facilitated by communication that allows for and respects difference and recognizes similarity.

How does this work, then? First of all, language education allows for communication in a very literal sense. If you are familiar with the language of a particular individual, you are, very literally, able to communicate with that person. Secondly, on a more metaphorical level, learning someone's language has the potential to indicate a kind of respect for and desire for understanding of that person's culture and perspective. Because language is central to how we view the world, speaking someone's language can help us understand how the world looks through the eyes of someone else, further improving our ability to connect with and understand others.

Language is a powerful tool that can be used in many different ways. It can be used for domination, allowing the groups whose language is favored to become dominant in other areas of culture as well. Dominated groups can similarly be

controlled by language through the deprivation of use or education of a particular language. As Marcia Farr, Lisya Seloni, and Juyoung Song explain in *Ethnolinguistic*

Diversity and Education:

These ideologies [about language and literacy] are particularly damaging because they seem to be ‘commonplace’ notions about, for example, what is good, bad, elegant, or impoverished language, simultaneously placing the speakers of such labeled language into hierarchical social relations.²¹

If language has such a strong influence that it can disrupt a power balance in these ways, we may also be able to redirect this power in a way that brings us together through communication. By learning someone’s language you are hardly “becoming” like them, yet you are able to interact in a way that promotes cooperation and understanding to the greatest possible extent.

Emphasis on cultural exchange puts this view slightly on the cosmopolitan side of the spectrum. Yet, I’d argue that this idea is not entirely cosmopolitan, as it emphasizes the importance of language, which is common to views often labeled as multicultural. For instance, I am in no way advocating for a universal language. In fact, adopting a universal language would go against this view by potentially creating a dynamic in which one language and the culture associated with it become gain an unjustified level of influence and power. As we’ll see, recognizing the power of language to dominate and oppress will allow us to also recognize the power that language has in promoting unity and cooperation.

By suggesting that we ought to support foreign language and multilingual education I aim to promote a view and practice that would enhance global

²¹ Marcia Farr, Lisya Seloni, and Juyoung Song. *Ethnolinguistic Diversity and Education: Language, Literacy, and Culture* (New York: Routledge. 2012) 6.

communication. I also hope to support, rather than detract from, linguistic diversity and the persistence of rare and suppressed languages. The goal of language education is not to replace any particular language in any way. Rather, it is to create an environment of respect in which knowledge of multiple languages is a tool for effective communication despite cultural differences. In this way, I think that language education can help to form an effective viewpoint that utilizes the advantages of both multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

Looking back to the questions we considered at the beginning of this discussion, what can we conclude about with whom we should identify and what value we ought to place on culture? Perhaps it's disappointing to discover that I've fully embraced neither the cosmopolitan nor the multicultural view. On the contrary, I think that we neither have to embrace nor reject any particular view of culture in order to produce a sound view of intercultural interaction. It is less important to focus on the details of with whom we ought and ought not identify, and more important to focus on how to foster understanding and cooperation.

Chapter 2

The Role of Understanding

In many ways the multicultural and cosmopolitan views are theories of morality just as much as they are theories of culture. They do not merely describe how we are affected by culture, they also suggest how we *ought* to be affected by culture, or given the effects that culture has, how we *ought* to address our differences. We need a theory of culture in order to help guide our interactions with others, and to help hone ethical skills that can affect how these interactions play out. Even more importantly, a moral theory of culture can help to determine which ethical skills are most beneficial to these interactions.

Both cosmopolitans and multiculturalists seek to guide our moral actions, and encourage us to develop different ethical skills related to both how we identify as individuals and how we address those who identify differently. I've taken issue with both the multicultural and cosmopolitan views' approach to interaction and difference. These two theories share a view of difference that frames cultural and experiential differences as negative. I think that it's possible to both address this issue and reconcile these views by establishing a moral focus through which to approach the issue of difference. In other words, the first step to improving upon and reconciling these two views of culture is to figure out how to make our ethical approach towards others compatible with or even in support of cultural diversity and differences of experience.

To do this, we must try to pinpoint which moral skills we can develop which will allow for differences of experience and opinion to be acknowledged rather than ignored or assimilated. By acknowledging these differences in experience, we are not trying to separate people who come from different backgrounds into distinct groups which can agree independently on acceptable values and approaches to ethics. Rather, we're looking to find a way to take these differences into account when choosing which ethical skills have the potential to be most useful in handling cultural differences. This moral focus should allow for and encourage cooperation among those who come with different sets of experience.

In this chapter, I plan to consider several things, including respect, empathy, and care, which are often considered to be possible ethical skills that can help guide our interactions with others. I plan to conclude that while all of these skills are indeed important, they fail to address the issue of difference effectively unless used in conjunction with understanding. Focusing on understanding makes it possible to approach interactions in a way that is mindful of issues of difference. As we'll see, this will set the stage for a discussion of the role that language plays in understanding in chapter three.

Respect

The idea that respect should be a guiding principle in the attitude we hold towards others and the approach that we take towards our interactions with them is central to many moral theories. As Robin Dillon explains in her article on respect for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Respect for persons is a central concept in

many ethical theories; some theories treat it as the very essence of morality and the foundation of all other moral duties and obligations.”²² Dillon goes on to define just what respect entails, and for whom it is traditionally intended: “In the literature of moral and political philosophy, the notion of respect for persons commonly means a kind of respect that all people are owed morally just because they are persons, regardless of social position, individual characteristics or achievements, or moral merit.”²³

As Dillon’s explanation of respect acknowledges, one important element of respect is that it ought to exist regardless of differences that may exist between ourselves and others. In other words, we must learn to respect others without regard to either their social standing or the extent to which they are similar to us. While self-respect is very important, I think that it is equally important to develop a sense of respect for others with whom we have little in common. Without this respect for others, what motivates us to have any kind of moral concern for them? At the very least, we must learn to respect the extent to which others are worthy of our moral concern.

Yet, respecting others regardless of differences in achievement, personal characteristics, moral merit, or indeed culture, is easier said than done. Even if we do manage to embody this kind of respect, questions still remain—how can we follow through on this respect by actually treating others respectfully? Recognizing and respecting the rights to which others are entitled is all very well, but it seems that

²² Robin S. Dillon, "Respect", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/respect/>>.

²³ Dillon

there must be some motive other than respect that encourages us to act in a way that defends these rights. Furthermore, it seems that a part of treating an individual respectfully is making an attempt to understand him or her, and thereby understand his or her needs. As Dillon explains, “in respecting an object, we respond to it not as an extension of feelings, desires, and interests we already have, but as something whose significance is independent of us.”²⁴ In other words, in order to respect someone, we must respect that his or her desires and interests are independent from our own. If this person does not share our feelings and interests, what feelings and interests do they possess? It seems that the next step towards acting on our respect for another is to attempt to understand his or her independent desires, interests, and experiences, and their sources.

Respect is important because it constitutes recognition of the moral worth of others—it is recognition of the necessity that we treat others in a particular way. Respecting someone does not guarantee that they receive a certain type of treatment, rather, it acknowledges that they deserve that type of treatment. To act respectfully towards someone, we must learn to “follow through,” if you will, with our respect for that individual. I think that the ethical skills involved in showing respect are not only moral tools, they are practical ones. This can consist of several things, including gaining an understanding of their needs and emotions, and becoming motivated to act in way that takes these needs and emotions into account. That means that respect must be accompanied by a few other ethical actions or capacities. If respect governs how we go about seeing others, what governs the ways in which we treat them in our

²⁴ Dillon

interactions? I think that it's important to focus on what other capacities might be needed to work in conjunction with respect. In addition to learning to respect others, we must learn to cultivate our capacities for other ethical skills such as empathy, care, and, especially, understanding.

The Trouble with Empathy

What other ethical skills can be cultivated in order to fully act upon our respect for others? There are many possible approaches to motivating our moral interactions. One concept that has become increasingly popular in contemporary feminist philosophy is the idea of "care" as a motivating force in interactions. Nel Noddings provides an explanation of care in *The Challenge to Care in Schools*:

"In Caring (1984) I described the state of consciousness of the carer (or "one-caring") as characterized by engrossment and motivational displacement. By engrossment I mean an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for. Other writers have used the word "attention" to describe this characteristic."²⁵

While I certainly support many of the main aims of care as a moral guideline, I think that there's still a need for an intermediary step. Caring is an appealing ideal, and a good virtue to advocate, yet how do we motivate people to go from respect for an individual to actual care for him or her? How, especially, can we come to care about people or things who are far removed from ourselves, either spatially or in terms of differences in experience?

When we think about things which we instinctively come to care about, we find that more often than not, our caring is based in some kind of contact or

²⁵ Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992) 15.

connection between ourselves and those we care about. We care about our own children, siblings, classmates, because we are with them and have the physical and emotional connection necessary to share in their experiences. How, then, can we come to care about anyone with whom we lack this connection? There is nothing wrong with accepting care as a goal in our ethical interactions. However, even if care is our ultimate goal there is an ethical process that leads to this goal. As we'll see, this process must include understanding, empathy, and respect.

Since care is an expression of an inner motivation to treat others in a certain way, it seems that there must be another phenomenon that fuels this attitude towards others. In trying to find what it is that motivates and permits caring to occur, one might focus her attention on the idea of empathy. Perhaps by finding a way to respond emotionally to the experiences of others, it will be possible to be motivated to act in a way that is beneficial to those in question. In other words, through empathy we may be able to find the means for care.

One thing that makes an analysis of empathy tricky is that scholars are not all in agreement about what constitutes empathy. Jesse Prinz, for instance, defines empathy to be “a matter of feeling an emotion that we take another person to have.” With this definition in mind, relying on empathy morally may seem reprehensible, because it is overly demanding and has the potential to allow for excessive bias in with whom we empathize. If empathizing is the same as feeling an emotion that we take another to have, then we are most likely to empathize with those whose emotions we can readily identify, and whose emotions we readily feel at a visceral level. These people are likely to be those who are close to us: our family, friends, and community.

However, not all definitions of empathy imply the direct transfer of emotion to this extent. Diana Meyers, for instance, states that “broad empathetic engagement seeks to understand another person “from the inside” – that is, to imaginatively replicate the other’s subjective experience, including its cognitive, affective, corporeal, and desiderative dimensions.” This definition of “broad empathy” relies not so much on the reflection of an emotion, but rather on the construction of an experience that is like that which another person experiences. As I see it, Meyers’ definition of “broad empathy” includes not only empathy, but what I’ll refer to as “understanding.” Lori Gruen adopts a similarly broad view of empathy. What she refers to as “engaged empathy” requires individuals to “reflectively imagine themselves in the position of the other.”²⁶ What Meyers’ and Gruen’s views have in common is a perception of empathy that does not require us to viscerally experience the emotions of another, but to actively, cognitively, place ourselves into the emotional environment of another. By defining empathy in this way, Meyers and Gruen point out the necessity of understanding another’s situation in order to empathize with them. I plan to go further and argue that understanding should be treated as a separate ethical skill from empathy, and that it merits more focus than these accounts of empathy allow it.

I think that empathy is a highly variable ethical skill that can either be very beneficial or potentially detrimental depending on the way it is used. In “Against Empathy,” Prinz points out that we empathize more readily with those who are similar to ourselves. As he says, “We *can* empathize with members of the out-group,

²⁶ Lori Gruen, "Attending to Nature: Empathetic Engagement with the More Than Human World," Ethics & the Environment 14.2 (2009): 29

but only by making their similarities salient.”²⁷ This objection to the idea of empathy is very important to address. Without an acknowledgement and acceptance of the differences between ourselves and others, we run the risk of either failing to empathize or misplacing our empathy by treating others as though they necessarily emote in the same way that we do.

However, I don’t agree with Prinz that this makes empathy, as an ethical skill, necessarily hopeless. If we can learn to empathize in a way that recognizes the importance and the validity of differences between ourselves and those with whom we are empathizing, in other words, empathy in conjunction with respect and understanding, then empathy is a very helpful tool. Without being accompanied by understanding, empathy can lead us to attribute our own emotions to others rather than gaining a thorough grasp of their emotions and the ways in which they are affected by experience.

Diana Meyers explains this criticism of empathy in her essay “A Conception of Empathy for Border Crossers” in a reference to Peter Goldie. Specifically, she emphasizes his criticism of a kind of “in-his-shoes” empathy. As Meyer states:

*You imagine yourself just as you are – your strengths and weaknesses, your value system and desires, your commitments to others, and so forth – transposed into someone else’s life situation (Goldie 2000, 199). Insofar as you are different from the person who actually occupies that position, self-projective imagining reveals more about you and your subjectivity than it does about the other individual’s identity and subjectivity. Although admonishing someone to put herself in someone else’s shoes is a colloquial way to exhort someone to be more empathetic, Goldie is right to distinguish self-projective imagining from empathy.*²⁸

²⁷ Jesse Prinz, "Against Empathy." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49 (2011): 224

²⁸ Diana Meyer, "A Conception of Empathy for Border Crossers," Unpublished Manuscript, 3.

Meyers and Goldie make a good point in criticizing this standard view of empathy, and it is important to be cautious about the possibility of projecting ourselves onto the experiences of others. Meyers includes the capacity to “see others from the inside” as an element of empathy. I think that we need to consider the ability to understand situations other than our own separately from empathy. This is not quite the same as viewing “from the inside.” Rather, its aim is to grasp *what the inside is*. By reinforcing the value of understanding separately from empathy and care, we can ensure that care and empathy can occur in the most positive way possible, meaning, in a way that does not assume others to be emotionally, intellectually or culturally identical to ourselves.

If we think of each individual as being contained within a box that defines the limits of its feelings and emotions, we can see how respect, understanding, empathy, and care all play different roles. Respect is the acceptance of the fact that each person lives in a box that is different from our own. Understanding is the ability to grasp what it would be to live inside of another person’s box. Empathy is the ability to place ourselves artificially into another’s box and “feel out” what their emotions are from their perspective. And care, finally, is the motivation to go out and do something about the emotions and needs that we recognize in others.

With this analogy in mind, we can see the problem with jumping straight to empathy without fully developing understanding and respect. By doing this, we risk forcing others into our own box without understanding that that is simply not the shape that they take. Understanding and respecting another is not about imagining how we could feel what they feel, then, it is about understanding that their feelings

are valid and that they do not necessarily coincide with our own. It is this notion of understanding that truly conveys why it needs to be considered separately from empathy: In order to understand, we must focus on and accept differences between ourselves and others, rather than our similarities.

Empathy is an essential element of a larger approach to viewing other persons. Still, it must be noted that empathy is volatile. It must be grounded in a solid foundation of respect and understanding in order to remain a positive force in our actions towards others.

Meyer goes on to say that she finds Goldie's view of empathy to be overly demanding in terms of the understanding that he requires of us. Meyer opts for a more practical view. With a conception of empathy that merely encourages readers to give up all hope of becoming empathetic, what good is empathy at all? Though I agree that practicality is essential, I think that Meyer is compensating in the wrong places. We should consider the possibility that by trying to make empathy "easy" we lose more than we gain. Even if gaining total understanding of another is never fully possible (we are not, after all, in his/her shoes,) perhaps a realization of the fact that this understanding is not possible, and the will to aim for it anyway, is more important to develop than empathy that is based on a lack of real understanding.

So, understanding and empathy do have many things in common: both things are part of the process of interpreting and reacting to the emotions of others. In fact, the terms "empathy" and "understanding" came to be closely associated and sometimes even used interchangeably near the beginning of the 20th century. In this

context, empathy was understood as a “method of grasping the content of other minds” while understanding had to do with the method of grasping meaning, specifically the meanings of actions, texts, and works of art.²⁹ In this sense of “grasping” an idea or feeling, understanding and empathy do seem to have quite a bit in common.

Still, ‘empathy’ has come to be understood as the emotional response involved in our reactions to the emotions of others, while ‘understanding’ has come to signify the ways in which we are able to process and comprehend the experiences, background, and situations that affect the emotions of the other person. It is because of this that I think understanding is essential to empathizing in a way that is helpful and beneficial to those with whom we empathize.

In this way, despite Meyer’s insistence that understanding is a demanding and unachievable ideal, there are elements of understanding that make it a preferable goal to strive for. Understanding is both more and less achievable than empathy. Understanding is more demanding than empathy in that it is a necessary basis for empathy, and it requires us to make a deeper and more extensive investigation into the different things that affect others. Still, it is less demanding than empathy in that it accepts that an artificial, hypothetical variety of empathy might be sufficient (or even preferable) to an explanation of empathy that requires us to instinctively come to feel the same way that we perceive another to be feeling. This more measured, less visceral variety of empathy allows for and works well with understanding.

²⁹ Karsten Stueber, “Empathy,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition) Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/empathy/>>.

Understanding is something we should be able to achieve without sharing the same experiences or even the same emotions as the person we understand. Although empathy and understanding are closely linked in many ways, understanding lacks the emotionally charged nature of empathy, and instead is grounded in our ability to grasp the intentions, emotions, and experiences of others. I'm not looking to reject notions of morality that rely on care or empathy as their central focus. Rather, I want to highlight the importance of understanding as an ideal in our interactions, and, especially, in education.

What is Understanding?

A focus on moral understanding can help to provide a specific goal that allows for and encourages the interaction of different perspectives. It can also help to construct a moral theory that focuses on the social role of ethics. I think that understanding could be the key to a perspective on morality that acknowledges and embraces the importance of differences and interactions in the construction of moral motivation and action. Understanding should not replace other ethical skills; it should work in conjunction with them to make interactions more positive.

“Understanding” can be taken, in a linguistic sense, to refer to the ability to get from a statement or sentence the same meaning that the utterer of the sentence attributed to it, assuming that the speaker and listener share a common language or are provided with a means of translating from one language to another. As used in this context, understanding refers to the capacity to “get” the perspective of another person, not merely through accurate comprehension of their words, but through a

grasp of the experiences, beliefs, culture, and circumstances that produced their words and actions.

By striving for understanding in our everyday interactions, we can actively encourage a more positive conception of difference. Differences between people, in this view, are not just nuisances that have to be dealt with. Rather, they are a crucial central focus of morality, as through understanding those with views different from our own we can come to a richer and more complete understanding of morality. The advantage of viewing understanding as a moral ideal is that it encourages and requires us to see our interactions and moral dilemmas from different perspectives. Acknowledging the validity of these different perspectives allows us to avoid seeing those who hold them as a nuisance – instead, we are able to respect others by striving for an understanding of the opinions they hold.

There are many different ways to achieve understanding. It seems intuitive that one of the most basic ways of understanding another is through the similarities that we have with that person. Essentially, we can understand people with whom we have something in common, or, at the least, understand the aspect of their character or identity that we share. It certainly seems that one of the most direct ways of understanding a particular experience is by actually having that experience. Yet, this view of understanding is neither constant nor complete. As Brian Fay points out in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*, “Knowing an experience implies more than simply having it; knowing implies being able to identify, describe, and

explain.”³⁰ I’ll discuss the implications of this link between understanding and identity further when we consider the role that language plays in understanding. For now, it’s important to note that understanding is meant to extend beyond a mere understanding of those things that are similar to us. One of the key goals of a moral view focusing on understanding is specifically to present a theory that encourages interaction between people who have different sets of experience. We should keep this goal in mind in order to establish clear distinctions between understanding and several closely related concepts.

So, as Fay points out, the ability to understand is not the same as, nor is it linked with, identifying with or in any way “being” another. Fay explains this by pointing out that what he refers to as “being one” is neither necessary for nor sufficient for “knowing one.” In other words, being part of a group that shares a particular experience does not guarantee our capacity to truly understand other members of that same group, and, likewise, having a particular experience is not necessary for developing an understanding of that experience, or the people who have it.

So far, we’ve focused on a few of the things that understanding is *not*. Understanding is not, and should not be, dependent upon a person’s being identical to those he or she seeks to understand. Though it is clearly simpler to understand an experience that resembles one’s own, an important element of understanding in this context is the aim of understanding differences just as one would understand

³⁰ Brian Fay, Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1996) 20.

similarities. Likewise, understanding is not the same as empathy, care, or respect, though it is something that ideally would work in conjunction with these things. So what is understanding? Or, more importantly, perhaps, how do we go about understanding another?

In this view, understanding is the grasp of the idea that a multitude of perspectives on any issue exist, and the attempt to learn how to see the world from perspectives other than our own. There is a reason why walking a mile in another's shoes is a cliché. Yet walking a mile in another's shoes isn't a perfect analogy for understanding. As we'll see, we needn't actually experience the things that someone else has experienced in order to understand them. On the contrary, the goal of moral understanding only requires us to come to an internal grasp of what those experiences were and what effect they may have had. We're not so much expected to walk a mile in another's shoes as to 'know' in some way what walking that mile would have been for that person, and indeed, acknowledge that the experience is different than it would have been for us, even with the same shoes.

This is the essence of understanding; this form of understanding is the capacity to grasp the ways in which a person might react to a situation given the experience that they approach the situation, without either being in his position or sharing his experiences. This kind of understanding also involves the ability to grasp the intentions and expectations that are behind a person's words. In short, understanding is one step short of empathy – we do not need to share another's emotions in order to understand them, as we would in order to be empathetic. Rather,

we just need to comprehend what those emotions would be, and be in touch with the situations that others are in, even if those situations are unfamiliar to us.

Why Focus on Language?

We have tentatively concluded that understanding, and specifically understanding between difference cultural groups, is a way of knowing an experience without necessarily having that particular experience. This is different from empathy in that it does not necessarily mean that we experience an emotional reaction linked to the emotions of the person that we understand. It is also different from respect in that it goes beyond a mere tolerance for the way that a person thinks and feels – understanding involves a deeper commitment to the reasons behind another’s actions and the causes of their emotions. In order to understand a person, we are not merely expected to respect the person’s emotions or responses as valid and worthy of moral consideration. Instead, we are expected to consider more deeply the causes behind a person’s actions, emotions, and reactions.

Once we embrace understanding as our moral focus, we must determine in which scenarios understanding can take place. We’ve already established that we do not have to be identical to others in order for understanding to take place. What, then, if anything, must we have in common? If having something in common is not essential, what tools can we use to gain an understanding of others? Is sharing a language necessary for understanding? Even if sharing a language is not crucial, can we argue that it enhances understanding in some way?

The necessity of shared language for this type of understanding is not yet clear – what exactly about failing to share a language means that we cannot fully understand a speaker’s perspective? It seems that there must be a way to establish this form of understanding separately from the transfer of information contained in conversation itself. Whether it is possible to preserve the meaning of a sentence while it is converted into another language through translation is a tricky question to address. What I’m looking to argue here, though, is that regardless of whether or not translation can accurately preserve the meaning of a sentence and transmit it to the listener intact, there is a side to understanding that goes above and beyond this basic transmission of information.

In *The Preoccupation with Problems of Understanding in Communications Research* Samuel G. Lawrence explains that understanding of individual words does not necessarily imply a whole understanding of what a person intends to say. Specifically, he emphasizes that it is possible to understand the words that a person utters without understanding the context behind those utterances.³¹ It is in this sense that understanding must go beyond the kind of understanding that can be provided by translation. Even if a translation can provide a thorough understanding of an utterance, I argue that it lacks the ability to communicate intention, belief, and experience.

Of course, one could argue that this kind of understanding cannot be developed through direct communication in a shared language either. The advantage

³¹ S. G Lawrence, “The Preoccupation with Problems of Understanding in Communication Research,” *Communication Theory*, 9 (1999): 265–291.

of direct communication, however, is it implies not only that we are able to understand another, but also that we are able to understand that we are being understood. In this way, understanding is necessarily a two way street – an active endeavor in which both parties in an interaction must partake. Taking into account this reciprocal quality of understanding makes the need for a common language much more evident. When two people share a language, they are able to communicate directly. Reactions to words and statements are immediate and direct, and do not rely on an intermediary in any way. This equips them with the ability not only to understand, but also to feel understood. The sense of understanding that I'm addressing here, unlike the direct understanding of the contents of a statement, cannot be achieved simply through translation.

As we'll see in the next chapter, language and language education play a substantial role in helping to foster understanding. By helping us to build understanding, they, in turn, help us to follow through with the respect that we have for other individuals, and help to establish the basis for empathy and respect towards even those with whom we do not have much in common. I hope to show that learning to understand another language provides a gateway to learning how to understand the experiences and circumstances of others in a deeper and more thorough way. This understanding is crucial to making it possible to interact ethically with those who are different from us.

Chapter 3

Language and Understanding

In this chapter, I plan to explore the role that language plays in culture and identity, the ways in which language contributes to understanding, and how language education can help learners to cultivate intercultural understanding. Language learning enables us to communicate more directly and effectively with speakers of other languages. However, there is a second side to the benefit of language education: by placing value on language we place value on cultivating the capacity to view multiple perspectives and therefore on understanding. In other words, there are two facets to the understanding that we build through language education. On the one hand there is the understanding that occurs between those who share language, and on the other hand there is the increased understanding that we gain for others in general through the study of language.

The concept of “understanding” does not only refer to understanding between different cultural groups or members of different cultural groups. As I discussed in the previous chapter, understanding can be applied in a wide range of scenarios. It refers to the ability to grasp the experiences of another in order to potentially motivate empathy and care. Still, intercultural interactions are a main context in which the importance of understanding can be observed. They are also among the situations in which understanding proves to be the greatest challenge. By examining the importance of understanding in an intercultural context, we’ll come to find that language is one of the things that contribute most fundamentally to understanding. I’ll

conclude by introducing different approaches to language education, which I'll go on to discuss in greater detail in chapter four.

What does Language Do?

Before we can construct a thorough explanation of how language affects and plays a role in understanding, we need to determine what we mean by “language” in this context. We're not considering “language” in the structural sense, but rather, considering the cultural and social meaning of language. We need to look at what constitutes “different languages,” and consider different dialects and vernacular varieties of the same language as well. We'll also need to consider language in terms of how the lexicon that each individual or group uses has a social effect on that person or group of people.

In other words, we're not merely looking to determine what *language* is, but what *languages* are, and what distinguishes one from another. How can we determine what separates one language from another, or even what separates speakers of one language from speakers of another? Focusing on this can help us determine several things that will be helpful in viewing language from an ethnic and social perspective.

There are many ways to define what constitutes a “different language,” and in many historical cases, the perceived “sameness” or “difference” of languages has been influenced by political and social motives as much as by linguistic ones. However, one common way of distinguishing between languages is on the basis of mutual intelligibility. As Stephen R. Anderson explains: “One common-sense notion of when we are dealing with different languages, as opposed to different forms of the

same language, is the criterion of mutual intelligibility: if the speakers of A can understand the speakers of B without difficulty, A and B must be the same language.”³² In some ways this definition leaves a lot of wiggle room. For instance, what about cases where person A can understand person B, and not vice-versa? Or, for that matter, cases where dialects A and B and dialects B and C are mutually intelligible, yet dialects A and C are not? Despite these complications, I think that this definition of difference in language should be acceptable for the purpose of defining what constitutes foreign language, second language, or bilingual education. For my purposes here, I’ll refer to “foreign” or “second” language education when the language being taught is notably distinct from the base language in the classroom, meaning, either different from the primary political language in the location in question, or from the primary language spoken in the homes of the majority of the students in the given classroom.

However, we should keep in mind that linguistic differences are important even when they are not so strong as to prevent the languages or dialects from being mutually intelligible. Linguistic variation within a single “language” can affect understanding in much the same way that differences between languages do. Even though this variety of linguistic difference is not the main consideration of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that these linguistic differences do exist and carry with them many of the same challenges and social issues that come with other forms of linguistic diversity.

³² Stephen R. Anderson, "How Many Languages Are There in the World?" (Washington, D.C.: Linguistic Society of America 2004) <http://www.lsadc.org/info/pdf_files/howmany.pdf> 7.

Language and Cultural Identity

There are many different components to cultural identity. The standard view of “culture” is that culture is “a complex set of shared beliefs, values, and concepts which enables a group to make sense of its life and which provides it with directions for how to live.”³³ Depending on the individual, of course, different components of culture can comprise a more or less significant part of the individual’s identity. Someone who grew up in a religious background might choose to identify strongly with the religious rituals that were an important part of their youth. Similarly, someone who grew up in a family of musicians may associate more strongly with the music that is part of their native culture. The same kinds of connections can be found between individuals and other elements of culture that are important to them on an individual basis.

What, then, sets language apart from elements of culture? How can the language one speaks go beyond other elements of culture such as clothing, food, and ritual in how it defines identity and fosters understanding?

We can take a hint from Fay’s next variation of the previous definition of culture: “In perhaps the most influential variant of this standard view, culture is pictured as a text the vocabulary and grammar of which its members learn.”³⁴ This analogy indicates just how important language itself is to culture. Building on Fay’s analogy, to grasp the customs, rules, and rituals that define a culture is akin to become “fluent” in a culture. Thus, the most important and profound way in which one can

³³ Fay 55

³⁴ Fay 55

grasp a culture is in the manner in which one grasps a language. While this is an analogy to language rather than a direct description of language itself, we can see that the understanding of a language is one of the most significant and thorough means of understanding that exists. I'd propose that we can go beyond the analogy here and take this as an indicator of the important role that we may find language plays in culture as well as in identity.

Language plays a special role in individual identity as well as in culture. Regardless of what aspects of a culture an individual chooses to identify with most strongly, the way that a person speaks and the language in which they speak is one of the primary ways that they present themselves to the world. Language is a social phenomenon – it is what allows us to communicate with others and to share our internal thoughts verbally with the outside world. In this way, language shapes both how we define ourselves in a social context, and how we interact, making it a key component to both our individual and group identities.

Language can be thought of as what links people, as individuals, with particular cultural or ethnic groups. Karmela Liebkind explains this close connection in *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*: “It has been claimed that ethnic identity is intrinsically connected with language. Language interweaves the individual’s personal identity with his or her collective ethnic identity.”³⁵ The link between language and ethnic identity is evident in the many things that language allows us to do. For instance, language acts as an instrument for naming the world, as

³⁵ Karmela Liebkind, "Social Psychology," *Handbook of Language & Ethnic Identity*, Ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 143.

well as affecting the upbringing of children.³⁶ Leibkind goes on to emphasize the idea that language is not only what unites particular ethnic groups, but also what distinguishes different groups from one another. “Language is frequently a highly salient feature of such cultural differences and can become the most important symbol of ethnic identity.”³⁷

Of course, coming from a cosmopolitan perspective, one may argue that we need not and ought not focus on markers of culture at all. Each individual is, in fact, different, and each is bound to be influenced by elements of multiple cultures. I’d argue, though, that there is a crucial link between language and group identity. Language of some variety is common to all people – we simply can’t avoid speaking one language or another. Whatever language a person does speak primarily is guaranteed to link him or her to a particular cultural heritage. Amado M. Padilla explains just how this link occurs. “Language,” he says, “gives meaning to an ethnic group because it connects the present with the past through its oral traditions, literary forms, music, history, and customs. In essence, it is frequently language which gives an ethnic group its distinctiveness.”³⁸ It is for this reason that the loss of native language causes concern for various ethnic groups around the world – by losing their language, they are losing some element of their identity. The converse is also true. By encouraging members of their population to adopt their native language, they feel that they can “bring back” a certain lost element of the culture in question.

³⁶ Leibkind 143

³⁷ Leibkind 143

³⁸ Amado M. Padilla, "Psychology," Handbook of Language & Ethnic Identity, Ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 116.

Therefore, speaking a particular language is a stronger and more definitive mark of cultural heritage than other tokens of culture are. In this way, seeing language as a central feature of both culture and identity should tie us down to neither a cosmopolitan nor a multicultural view of culture. On the contrary, this focus merely shows that language is both what ties us to certain cultural groups and what gives us the potential to transcend those groups, if not in identity, in understanding. When we accept language as a cultural tie, all we're saying is that language is deeply rooted in cultural identity, not that this cultural identity must therefore trump individual identity in the case of any particular person. Because of its strong link with cultural identity, language is a tool that we can use to help facilitate intercultural communication.

In addition, language “provides the resources on the basis of which we assert, question, demand, and judge.”³⁹ This helps to demonstrate just how important language is to facilitating communication. Without it, we lack the resources necessary to do these things. Perhaps then, just as sharing a language can allow us to communicate, *not* sharing a language can effectively prohibit thorough communication. Even though some form of communication is clearly possible through translation, I argue that there is a kind of *understanding* that occurs best when communication occurs between speakers of the same language.

Language and Understanding

How, then, does the ability to speak the same language help us better understand each other? On a very basic level, sharing a language enables us to

³⁹ Fay 55

communicate directly with one another. Yet communication is surely not the only benefit to sharing a language. If this were the case, why would translation not be an acceptable replacement? After all, translation enables even those with no common language at all to communicate facts and ideas very effectively, in many cases.

In order to really grasp the importance of shared language in building understanding between individuals and cultural groups, we have to look at what sets direct communication apart from communication through translation. I think that the answer to this question lies in the connection between language and identity – by speaking with a person in their native tongue, we are not merely effectively communicating our ideas, we are also demonstrating an understanding of an element of that person’s identity that manifests itself through language. Communicating through translation, while it may effectively communicate ideas and information, lacks this particular component.

If ideas and information can be adequately transmitted through translation, then what element is added by direct communication? As we touched on earlier, the way in which language is intertwined with ethnic identity and history is central to this added element. Nancy C. Dorian explains this further in *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*, “Although many behaviors can mark identity, language is the only one that actually carries extensive cultural content.”⁴⁰ The words that we share do more than communicate a particular piece of information. Each word in a particular language carries with it not only a particular reference in the world, but a history with

⁴⁰ Nancy C. Dorian, "Linguistic and Ethnographic Fieldwork," *Handbook of Language & Ethnic Identity*, Ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 31.

the individual who speaks it and with the language that developed it as well. When translation is not involved, the history of the word, and perhaps more importantly, the history that the speaker of the language has with a particular word are invoked when that word is spoken. In this way, when conversation occurs between speakers of the same language, both individuals demonstrate the experience that they have with the words that are spoken and, therefore, the understanding that they have of the experiences of the other. This not only facilitates each person's understanding of the other, but demonstrates to each individual that he or she is being understood.

It may appear that this understanding must be aided by demonstrating that the two speakers have something in common. In sharing a language, these speakers also share the ethnic history that is linked to and preserved within their common language. Since I'm planning to advocate for education in multiple languages, it could be concluded that we ought to learn multiple languages in order to "become more like" those with whom we come to share language, and learn their language in order to take on some of that history ourselves.

This is not the case. When native speakers of the same language communicate, the understanding that they share may indeed be due to acknowledging common experience. However, when a non-native language speaker of a language communicates with a native speaker, they cultivate understanding merely by showing that they each understand the history the other individual has with the words that he or she speaks, even if they do not necessarily share that history. In this way, understanding is aided by shared language even if this understanding does not reflect shared experience. This possibility is the core of understanding as I defined it in the

last chapter. Language facilitates the kind of understanding that can exist regardless of differences in experience.

Language, then, is closely linked with identity, and I am arguing that we can and should use shared language to help enable exchange and understanding between people with different sets of experience. This can often be accomplished through foreign language education without using language as a tool to alter any individual's identity. Language's close tie with identity helps it to facilitate understanding. By learning a language, we don't actually become part of the culture that the language is connected with. Instead, we are able to "grasp" or "get" in a certain sense what that culture is about, and how the experiences that come with that language (which are, themselves, often shaped by the language itself) have come to affect speakers of the language in question.

As an exchange student studying in the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, I spent several months struggling to communicate in a language that was not native to me. When I'd casually slip in a local expression or slang phrase into my moderately broken Spanish, I'd often have friends exclaim, affectionately "*¡Mira, ya eres Yucateca!*" (Look, you're a Yucatecan already!) I'm sure in many ways I was quite different from a Yucatecan – I grew up in an apartment in New York City, after all, speaking exclusively English and playing in the snow in the winter, and I was roughly a foot taller than most of my Mexican peers. What they were really trying to express, perhaps, was that though I still wasn't a Yucatecan, per se, I was learning how to *understand* Yucatecan ways to an extent that I hadn't before. I certainly couldn't claim to have become Yucatecan. But I could claim to have come to understand the

Yucatecan experience in a way that I hadn't before through my ability to relate directly to the words that they used in everyday conversation.

This same experience has surely happened many times over. There are many ways that travelers and tourists seek to “get to know” a culture, yet no amount of adventurousness with food, imitation of local dress, or interest in local art and music can match the act of learning a place or person's native language. Likewise, an inability to speak a place's native language is often what marks someone as an “outsider,” implying that the individual is not only not a member of a certain group, but also that they fail to understand something fundamental about that group's culture.

Language and Social Structure

As a key component of identity and a key tool in understanding, language can have a powerful social influence. Especially when issues of language become political, it is easy for language to assert the dominance of certain ethno-linguistic groups. The clearest example of this occurs when a particular language obtains some kind of legal dominance over another. The official language of a given place often has an advantageous position in many different sectors of society, giving speakers of this language a similarly advantageous position. The official language may be taught in schools to the exclusion of other languages, used exclusively in signs and official literature, or used primarily when naming new places, products, or institutions. All of these lead an official language to gain dominance over other languages, even other

languages native to the region, and cause a feeling of inferiority among speakers of other languages.

Placing different levels of respect and importance on different languages can have startling results, especially for speakers of less valued languages. This can be true both for speakers of languages that are foreign to their home place, speakers of languages that are native but non-official in the place that they reside, and speakers of “vernacular varieties” of an official language. As Marcia Farr, Lisy Seloni, and Juyoung Song point out in *Ethnolinguistic Diversity and Education*:

Children who come to school speaking vernacular varieties are then treated as though they have linguistic and cognitive deficits, rather than simply language differences. Instead of building on their strengths, teachers and administrators misclassify them and teach them to be ashamed of the way their families speak.⁴¹

A similar statement could likely be made about children who are raised speaking languages other than English in an English speaking nation. This kind of treatment not only runs the risk of damaging students’ self-esteem, it also can lead to rejection of either the students’ home language or the natively spoken language. For example, Native American students have a much higher drop-out rate than their Caucasian peers. At the same time, though, there has been a substantial shift in recent years away from native languages and towards English as a first, and often only, language for Native American youth. McCarty et.al. attribute this shift to the way that these languages and their speakers are received in the classroom.⁴²

⁴¹ Farr, Seloni and Song 7

⁴² Teresa L. McCartney, Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Larisa Warhol, and Ofelia Zepeda, "I'm Speaking English Instead of My Culture": Portraits of Language Use and Change among Native American

The strong social effect is partially due to the fact that language has the ability to be so influential with respect to identity on a group and individual level. When language is both a key element of how we define ourselves and a key component of how we relate to others, we develop an exceptionally strong connection to our native language. We therefore are vulnerable to language in a way that we are not to other less influential elements of culture. This means that it is easy for language to become powerful in a way that can be used both beneficially and harmfully. As Farr, Seloni, and Song explain:

*These ideologies [about language and literacy] are particularly damaging because they seem to be 'commonplace' notions about, for example, what is good, bad, elegant, or impoverished language, simultaneously placing the speakers of such labeled language into hierarchical social relations.*⁴³

If language has such a strong influence that it can disrupt a power balance in these ways, it makes sense that we may also be able to redirect this power in a way that brings us together through communication and understanding. By learning someone's language you are hardly "becoming" like them, yet you are able to interact in a way that promotes cooperation to the greatest possible extent. By sharing someone's (or some group of people's) language, we can get closer to understanding that individual's or group's experience without having had their experience ourselves. By treating languages with a higher level of respect and importance, we can help influence the effect that language and language use has on society, and use language in a way that fosters understanding and equality rather than diminishing understanding and allowing unfair patterns of dominance to continue.

Youth," Ethnolinguistic Diversity and Education, Ed. Marcia Farr, Lisya Seloni, and Juyoung Song (New York: Routledge, 2010) 69-72.

⁴³ Farr, Seloni, and Song 6

Language education is not automatically universally beneficial – like any kind of education, language education must occur with the right intentions in mind, and in a way that allows students to benefit. Language education has historically had many different motivations. Some second language curriculums have been developed to encourage the use of a second dominant language over a native language, for instance. Similarly, foreign language curriculums can be developed with different possible goals in mind. While I’m advocating for the use of foreign language education to help to promote intercultural understanding, the success of education in achieving this goal depends highly on the way in which language education is approached. Second language education can be instituted with the goal of introducing a dominant second language, thereby reinforcing the dominance of that language and of the culture associated with it. On the other hand, foreign language learning is usually implemented with the goal of providing students with additional skills of communication, rather than replacing their native tongue.

Bernard Spolsky explains this contrast between foreign and second language learning succinctly in *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*. In his words, “Foreign-language teaching was normally agreed to be additive. One learned a foreign language in order to add to one’s skills of communication or to provide additional access to other cultures or bodies of knowledge or people. Knowing a foreign language was [a] supplementary qualification, and no one was expected to shift linguistic identity.” This approach to foreign language education is what we ought to aim for to produce and increase intercultural understanding. Spolsky goes on to explain how the goals of second-language education can differ from this: “In

second-language teaching situations, in contrast, there was commonly an automatic assumption that a valued standard language, associated with a dominant culture, should replace the use of the less prestigious mother tongue.”⁴⁴

Therefore, I’m including this commentary on the social influence of language both because I hope for it to demonstrate the importance of language education, and as a cautionary note about the potential for language education to be a powerful influence that can be either positive or negative. In chapter four, I will discuss in greater depth the different possible varieties of language education and the influence that they can have on intercultural understanding.

The Value of Language Education

What’s the next step, now that we’ve established the important role that understanding plays in morality and the important role that language plays in understanding? We need to determine what can be done to encourage and promote understanding using this newfound theory. After all, language learning is a natural process, and it would be tricky to try to influence the languages that are learned (or not) among any segment of society. Since language is essential to understanding and can also be fundamental to establishing the roles that different groups play in society, language education can likewise be highly influential in creating understanding relationships and encouraging an atmosphere of understanding. Education can do this in a few key ways.

⁴⁴ Bernard Spolsky, "Second-Language Learning," Handbook of Language & Ethnic Identity, Ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 187.

You may notice that while we've discussed both language and understanding at length, we have not yet gone into what role education should play in cultivating either of these skills. I would need a work much more extensive than this thesis in order to give a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of education. However, in order to consider specifically the role of language education, it's important to think about the larger sphere of cultural education and consider both what the best way to approach cultural education is, and what our goals are in educating children about culture at all. We'll see that the views of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism apply strongly to the issue of education, and often do so in a way that is different from how these perspectives manifest themselves in other spheres. In fact, we'll find that cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism often lend themselves to the same educational goals, furthering the idea that education can be instrumental in bridging the gap between these two views.

How does this work, then? Curriculums that seek to promote the inclusion of language and cultural studies in the classroom often promote both a multicultural and a cosmopolitan viewpoint. As Nel Noddings explains in *Philosophy of Education*, "Although multiculturalism is an academic program directed at schools, one of its aims reaches well beyond classrooms—to produce people with cosmopolitan attitudes."⁴⁵ Of course, this statement seems to contradict the opposition between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism that I emphasized in chapter one. If cosmopolitan and multicultural views of the world are so commonly in opposition, how could it be that a multicultural academic plan could so readily encourage

⁴⁵ Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, 3 ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012) 218.

students to become cosmopolitan thinkers? I believe that attention must be paid to the important role that the educational context plays in bridging this gap.

As I see it, there are two possible ways that a multicultural perspective could manifest itself in an educational context. Those who favor a multicultural view could, presumably, aim to have different educational agendas implemented in different classrooms, depending on the predominant culture in the given classroom. This would, after all, be a way of giving autonomy to different ethno-linguistic groups. Giving different cultural groups the independence to educate their children in different ways is one important facet of multiculturalism.

On the other hand, a multicultural view of education could also manifest itself by advocating for the inclusion of different cultural studies in one classroom. The mere fact that this multicultural perspective is being reinforced through education *in one classroom* makes it less likely to produce the separation between cultures that multiculturalism is prone to produce outside of the classroom. In this way, including multiple cultural perspectives in the classroom is likely to encourage individuals to have a cosmopolitan perspective. This is one of the main ways that an educational approach can contribute to bridging the gap between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

At face value, learning a second language in school has the advantage of allowing us to communicate directly with and understanding speakers of that language. As I've argued, it also implies that this kind of education allows us to develop a kind of mutual understanding with other speakers of that language that

would not be as strong without the common language. Still, this is not the extent of the benefit gained from language education. On the contrary, language education can help to place value on intercultural understanding in a way that encourages students to seek this kind of understanding in other spheres. This places an increased emphasis on interaction, helping to bridge the divide between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

Learning to understand in this way is like training a muscle. If we can teach the value of understanding first by trying to better understand those with whom we share languages, we can get in the habit of approaching those different from ourselves with the open minded, understanding, and ultimately empathetic perspective that this language learning equips us with. Language is symbolic of larger differences in identity and experience, and therefore, recognizing differences in language as real and legitimate is the first step towards recognizing the importance and reality of other kinds of difference. Recognizing the importance of shared language is the key to yet another advantage of language education. Language education improves our capacity for understanding on a global level by encouraging a certain manner of viewing difference and by cultivating our capacity for viewing situations from perspectives different from our own. This means that language education has the potential to increase our capacity for intercultural understanding even with others with whom we do not share a mutual language.

Of course, if language education aims to create cultural understanding rather than specifically linguistic understanding, one might question the specific need for foreign language education. Perhaps it would be possible to promote a culturally

aware perspective without specifically using foreign language education. It is true that other elements of a curriculum could contribute to cultural awareness and knowledge. However, I think that language education shows a concrete commitment to cultural understanding that goes beyond other forms of education in this field. By placing importance specifically on language, educators demonstrate that their interest in promoting international and intercultural understanding goes beyond rhetoric.

Language education can be used in this way to both increase understanding in individual personal relationships, and increase our capacity for understanding by modifying and enhancing our default outlooks on life. Simply by seeing language as a necessity we cultivate a view of the world and of those different from ourselves that acknowledges and respects the need for this type of understanding. Acknowledging the need for understanding is in this way half the battle to creating that same understanding. By teaching language we give students two valuable things: the skills needed to communicate with and understand a wider network of people, and a value for the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of others.

We've seen that the languages taught in schools can have a profound effect on the role that these languages go on to play for the children to whom they are taught and the role that these languages play in society. It can also have a significant effect on the way that students view themselves and their peers when their own languages receive a certain kind of treatment in the classroom. We must recognize that this effect doesn't necessarily have to be a negative one. It is certainly possible for language education to reinforce inequality and divisions between linguistic groups. Yet, it is also possible for targeted language education to encourage understanding

and equality. By promoting bilingual education or advocating for the inclusion of foreign language education in monolingual classrooms, students can be equipped with the tools to better understand others and introduced to the importance of multiple ethnic and linguistic points of view.

Perhaps through an educational approach focused on language education we can develop a way to encourage linguistic diversity, equality, and intercultural understanding. Promoting foreign language education, bilingual education, and providing support for vernacular variations and native languages are all possible strategies for achieving these ends. Through these approaches to education, students not only learn how to communicate more effectively with speakers of other languages, but also come to recognize to importance of considering multiple perspectives on any issue that they may come across. I'll explore these possibilities further in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Models of Language Education

I've considered how language education has the potential to promote intercultural understanding both by giving students the ability to communicate with and understand others at a deeper level, and by reinforcing the value of intercultural knowledge and experience. Focusing on this kind of understanding in the classroom can also help to bridge the gap between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism by encouraging students to adopt a view of culture that embraces both cultural diversity and intercultural exchange.

Still, I've yet to discuss specifically how we ought to approach language education in the classroom in order to best support these goals. This practical component of my theoretical analysis of the importance of language education brings up several crucial questions. How much emphasis should be placed on language education? How should languages be presented? What model of language education best suits our purposes? And finally, how does the makeup of the student body in the classroom affect language learning and the perception of second and foreign languages?

The success of language education in achieving these goals is highly variable. Especially in regard to the goal of reinforcing the value of understanding, the extent to which language education can promote the value of intercultural understanding and experience depends highly on several factors. In his discussion of the teaching of political languages, Anthony Appiah states "Our real concern here is what languages

the school's students end up knowing."⁴⁶ I agree that the languages that students end up knowing are of the utmost importance. However, stating that this is our real concern with regards to language education seems to overlook the importance of a school's specific approach to language education.

The ability of a language education program to successfully reinforce students' capacity for understanding depends highly on how languages are presented in the classroom. Both the format of the approach to language education and the motivation behind the approach to language education can influence how well different methods of language instruction encourage students to place a high value on their own capacity to understand others. Therefore, in this chapter I'll consider a few different approaches to language education. I'll consider how foreign language education was approached historically, and how recent movements have influenced methods of foreign language education. I'll end by discussing bilingual education and seeing how being educated in a bilingual setting affects students' capacity for understanding on an intercultural level.

Societal Roles of Language: Definitions

I think that language education can play a valuable role in promoting understanding, and that it is therefore a valuable addition to school curriculums. However, it's important to remember that the effect of language education depends heavily on the language's role in the classroom and the perceived roles of the languages in society. With this in mind, it's important to consider different possible

⁴⁶ Appiah 102

approaches to language education, and to pay attention to how well they promote intercultural understanding.

One thing that can have a profound effect on the influence of language education is the role that the language in question plays in the environment of the students in the classroom. Therefore, before considering different kind of language education, it's important to consider and define different kinds of *languages*, meaning, different roles that languages can play in society. Here, I'll define a few varieties of language that often come into play in a classroom setting which I may discuss in this chapter. I feel it's important to define these terms not only to provide context for future discussion, but to give an overall sense of the complexities of language education.

Home Language, Mother Tongue – These terms refer to the language that an individual typically speaks in a non-academic context. This language may or may not be the same as the *political language* in the state. It also may or may not be the same throughout a particular group of students.

Ethnic Language, Heritage Language – This is the indigenous or historical language spoken by a particular ethnic group. This language is not necessarily the same as the home language, though they often overlap. There are cases in which the “native” language of a people or area is not the same as the language typically spoken by that same group. This scenario often occurs when an indigenous language is overtaken by another dominant language, which often becomes the political language of the region.

As we'll see, teaching children to speak their heritage language is often a tactic used in ethnic revival movements

Political language – This is the official or de facto official language of the state in question. Having a political language is important because it provides key access to the various roles and services that come with citizenship. The political language of a state provides access to public discussion, and serves as “a language that is one of the instruments of citizenship.”⁴⁷

Dominant International Language – This is a language (that may or may not be the home language of the students or the political language of the state) that is useful on an international scale. This language is a typical “second language” of many, as well as a dominant language in international business. This makes it often a useful language for speakers of other languages to learn in order to communicate with others on an international level and thrive in many professional contexts. Today, English is often used as the language of international business. Other languages, such as French and German, have also been used as international languages in the past.

Of course, many languages that could be taught in the classroom do not fall into any of these categories. In many educational contexts, children are educated in a foreign language, or in a secondary language that is common but not dominant in their region. However, we'll find that the roles that different languages play in society deeply influence the effect of educating children in or using that language. It is therefore important to note and define these different types of language.

⁴⁷ Appiah 101-102

Foreign Language Education

“Foreign language education” is distinguished by the fact that the languages taught in the classroom are not used locally, and are taught with the intention of use in specific, often academic, situations only. The organized teaching of foreign languages goes back to the classical era, when Greek and Latin were taught alongside local European languages.⁴⁸ In the United States, foreign language historically refers to a particular approach to language education that permitted the teaching of certain major European languages as a substitute for classical languages in the classroom.

One main advantage of foreign language education in its traditional role is that it is an “additive” approach, rather than a replacive one. This means that the languages taught in a foreign language classroom are typically thought of as supplemental to a student’s home language; languages taught in this way are to be used in specific, often formal, contexts, rather than to replace the students’ home language in daily interactions. Why is this advantageous? Approaching language education as additive allows students to study and get to know another language and culture without any implication that that particular culture is superior to or ought to take the place of their own. Maintaining this perspective allows students to delve into and actively consider multiple languages and world views while maintaining respect for their home language and mother tongue.

⁴⁸ Rosamond Mitchell, "Foreign Language Education: Balancing Communicative Needs and Intercultural Understanding," *Routledge International Companion to Education*, Ed. Bob Moon, Sally Brown, and Miriam Ben-Perez (New York: Routledge, 2000) 922.

Still, the approach that traditional foreign language education takes can also be disadvantageous. Though treating foreign language education as additive rather than replacive has the advantage of increased respect for the student's home language, it does not necessarily encourage the student to use their language skills in their daily life. What's wrong with this? When students have a motive for using a language in their own lives, they are more likely to use their new linguistic skills to communicate with and understand others outside of the classroom. The way in which a foreign language is presented in the classroom has a profound effect on the way in which the students use that language. Therefore, if a language is presented as something which is used solely for academic purposes, students are less likely to value it as they would their own language and allow it to carry over into use in their daily lives.

Second Language Education

“Second language education” historically refers to “the development of functional competence in a language used within the same community or country.”⁴⁹ This differs from foreign language education not only in that the language being taught is a locally used language, but in that the language being taught is often granted a much higher status than the native or home languages of the students in question. Second language education often occurs in one of two contexts: either in cases in which an outside language has come to dominant lesser-spoken local or indigenous languages, or in cases where immigrants are taught the majority or political language of their new home nation.

⁴⁹ Spolsky 186

It is not uncommon for the second language that is taught be the political language of the state in question. In the ethics of identity, Anthony Appiah states: “Language minorities have an interest in their children’s mastery of the political language.”⁵⁰ As he reinforces here, there is nothing wrong with the teaching of a political language—in fact, it is often an essential tool to citizenship in the given country. Learning the political language of a country is necessary for a variety of reasons – it puts immigrant and other linguistic minority groups on even footing economically and socially with native speakers of the political language. It does this because language is not only a tool of identity but a tool of citizenship. As Appiah explains “The exercise of citizenship requires the capacity to participate in the public discussion of the polity, and so there needs to be a language that is one of the instruments of citizenship.”⁵¹ Therefore, the issue of what language ought to be a particular nation’s political language aside, it is not only justified but essential to teach children a nation’s political language.

Still, this does not mean that a political language should be taught to the exclusion of other foreign or local languages. Second language education can be problematic due to the unusually high status that is granted to the language that is taught, and, by association, the culture and values of the speakers of that dominant language. It is important on a practical level for each individual to be equipped with the tools necessary for him or her to thrive socially, and this process often must involve the teaching of second languages. However, it is also important to make sure that this second language education does not occur to the detriment of personal or

⁵⁰ Appiah 102

⁵¹ Appiah 101

cultural identity. Ideally, we must find a way to approach language education that both gives linguistic minority students access to the same resources and tools that linguistic majority students enjoy thanks to their language, and upholds the importance of each individual's identity and home language.

I think that the ideal compromise, then, would be a system that provides support for second language learning that places adequate value on the language and culture of linguistic minority groups. In the next section, I'll discuss the use of language education in ethnic revival movements around the world, and see how this use of language aims to place a renewed emphasis on preserving the languages and cultures of linguistic minority groups. As we'll see, the distinction between additive foreign language teaching and replacive second language teaching has been blurred both by the increase in immigration and linguistic diversity and the ethnic revival movement.

Ethnic Revival Movements

Language learning has played a key role in ethnic revival movements around the world. In a sense, this use of language education is a reaction to replacive second language education. Like second language education, language education as part of the ethnic revival movement aims to influence the language spoken outside of the classroom by the students in question. The difference, of course, is that language education as part of these movements specifically targets members of certain ethnic groups in an attempt to restore a sense of ethnic identity. Language education of this

sort is most common in contexts where the language or traditions of a particular group have been suppressed by a dominant culture.

Indigenous communities around the world have become concerned over the past decades with loss of cultural identity, and, particularly, with the loss of native languages. Many indigenous organizations have responded to this concern by formally declaring their commitment to the continued teaching of their native language, seeing it as an essential method of preserving their cultural identity. For example, the Navajo Tribal Council showed their support for the teaching of their traditional language in the Navajo Tribal Education policies:

*The Navajo language is an essential element of the life, culture, and identity of the Navajo people. The Navajo Nation recognizes the importance of preserving and perpetuating that language for the survival of the Nation. Instruction in the Navajo language shall be made available for all grade levels in all schools serving the Navajo people.*⁵²

Several other groups, including the Ute Tribe, expressed similar concerns, often focusing specifically on educational policies.⁵³

Other movements to restore native language have been put into effect in various ethnic revival movements around the world. For instance, In Ireland there have been various attempts to restore the common knowledge and use of Gaelic in the large parts of the country where English had overtaken the native language. These efforts have largely involved formal education, introducing the Irish language in the classroom both using teaching methods of foreign language education, and using a

⁵² Edward T. Begay, "Resolution of the Navajo Nation Council," Navajo Nation Council (Window Rock, 1999)

⁵³ Norbert Francis and Jon Reyhner, Language and Literacy Teaching for Indigenous Education (Clevedon, England: Buffalo, 2002) 4.

bilingual format. Similar attempts were made during the 1980s to spread knowledge of Maori, the native language of New Zealand. In this case, language education started out in a more informal setting. Local community centers provided informal instruction to pre-school age children, encouraging children whose parents were not Maori speakers to learn the language. Eventually, formal education options were established for elementary school children, through both bilingual and immersion Maori programs in many state schools.⁵⁴

The reasoning behind the use of native languages to restore and revive traditional heritage is clear. As I discussed in the previous chapter, there is a vital link between language and culturally identity. Because of this, native languages are not only valuable in their own right, they are also fundamental to ensuring the perpetuation of native culture. This means that native language instruction has often been a tool used to promote native culture in other contexts, including representing the indigenous groups in the political sphere. Starting with the recognition of language, native groups can push to have their customs and people recognized on many other levels.

So, language education aimed towards ethnic revival is potentially an effective way to foster a communal identity a particular cultural group and encourage respect for their culture and traditions. Still, there are some concerns that must be raised about this approach's ability to cultivate intercultural understanding. For instance, why primarily teach these languages to those students whose ethnic heritage is that of the language in question? I understand the desire to maintain and promote

⁵⁴ Spolsky 183-184

the use of ethnic languages in order to preserve certain cultural traditions. However, it seems that this approach would be even more effective for the purpose of promoting intercultural understanding if these languages were taught more widely, thus transforming it from a multiculturalist endeavor to one aimed at increasing cosmopolitan understanding through acknowledging cultural and historical differences.

Perhaps a way to expand this approach, and allow it to benefit individuals of a variety of backgrounds, is to approach ethnic revival through bilingual education. As we'll see, bilingual education is unique in its ability to place languages that are foreign to members of the class on even ground with those students' home languages. This has the potential to encourage the revival of endangered ethnic languages while also encouraging and supporting interaction between ethnic speakers of those languages and speakers of majority languages in the same areas. This approach lends itself to a view of culture that supports both differences between the traditions of different cultural groups and interactions between those with distinct cultural identities.

One important thing to consider is the fact that the ethnic revival movement has also influenced schools approaches towards foreign language education in general. In addition to encouraging the revival and renewed teaching of certain endangered languages, the ethnic revival has encouraged schools to approach foreign language education in a new way. As Spolsky states, "Looking at published material on language learning and teaching before and after the ethnic revival, the most

striking feature is the addition of what is sometimes called cultural awareness.”⁵⁵ In other words, if nothing else, the ethnic revival movement alerted institutions of learning that language education can have a profound social effect, thereby encouraging them to leave traditional non-political techniques behind and pay closer attention to the effects of foreign language education. This approach is essential as it opens the door to new approaches to language education that emphasize cultural goals rather than merely pragmatic or academic ones.

This recognition of the power of language education is the first steps towards creating institutions of education that implement this power to the greatest and most beneficial extent possible. I do think that there are aspects of the ethnic revival that need to be rethought. For instance, language education programs that focus on ethnic revival tend to place a great emphasis on educating those students who are ethnically linked with the language in question. This emphasis is potentially problematic if we’re aiming to promote intercultural understanding and interactions in a diverse society. Still, the shift towards language education programs that focus on “multilingual communities at home and around the world” as was stated in the Standards for Foreign Language Education in 1996⁵⁶, can potentially make a great and positive change in the goals of language education.

Bilingual Education

One method of language education other than second language or foreign language education is bilingual education. Bilingual education is unique in that

⁵⁵ Spolsky 190

⁵⁶ Spolsky

languages are not taught directly in the classroom as a separate defined subject. Rather, two languages are used in the teaching of a variety of other subjects. I will argue that a bilingual approach to language education is an ideal compromise between the other approaches that we've discussed. Not only does bilingual education teach students to communicate in multiple languages effectively, it also encourages a perspective on language and culture that is most conducive to the kind of understanding that I introduced in chapter two. This is due to the fact that bilingual education also promotes a view of culture that combines elements of both multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. By educating students in bilingual classrooms, and especially through two-way dual language programs, we can reinforce their respect and understanding of both their own cultural background and those that are different from their own.

The term "bilingual education" is actually an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of different situations and scenarios. In the United States, "bilingual education" refers to "the use of English and another language for instructional purposes."⁵⁷ Of course, bilingual education has also been utilized even more widely outside of the United States. In its common usage, the term bilingual education has been extended to refer to "the [many] ways in which the basic idea of education through two languages has been adapted to meet the requirements of each school community."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Rosa Castro Feinberg, Bilingual Education: A Reference Handbook, Contemporary Education Issues, Ed. Daniel Weil, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2002) 1.

⁵⁸ Castro Feinberg 1

A Brief History of Bilingual Education in the United States

Bilingual education programs have existed in some form in the United States since the 16th century, when an integrated school was founded by the Spanish government in St. Augustine in 1565. In 1787, Franklin College became the first bilingual college to open in the United States, educating students in both German and English.⁵⁹ In the 1960s and 70s there was a powerful emergence of bilingual education that was fueled by several political developments in support of bilingual education. In 1968 the Bilingual Education Act was passed as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1968. In 1974, the Office of Bilingual Education was established, and the Equal Education Opportunity Act was passed, requiring states to take appropriate actions to educate students whose academic achievement may be impeded by language barriers. Finally, 1975 marked the establishment of the National Association for Bilingual Education, also known as NABE.⁶⁰

Of course, bilingual education programs have also encountered their fair share of opposition over the years. Opponents of bilingual education present a variety of arguments. Some see bilingual education as disadvantageous to language minority students, saying that they would be better off in English immersion programs. Other critics of bilingual education see bilingual and bicultural programs as detrimental to the American cultural identity. Embracing these language education programs, they

⁵⁹ Castro Feinberg 34

⁶⁰ Castro Feinberg 54

say, is the first step to allowing external cultures to take away from a unified national identity.

These oppositions to bilingual education have been both academic and political. “English Only” refers to legislation or political groups that advocate for legislation affirming the English language’s role as the unifying language of the United States. English First and U.S.ENGLISH, Inc. are some of the predominant “English only” activist and lobbying organizations. In a 1996 document titled “Welcoming Immigrants to a Diverse America: English as Our Common Language of Mutual Understanding” the House Republican Policy Committee criticizes bilingual education, saying that it holds back children from linguistic minority groups by preventing them from learning English effectively. As they state, “Bilingual-education programs often require teaching children in their native language and discourage the learning of English. ... They are wasteful, discriminatory, and too often produce children who are illiterate in any language.”⁶¹

Of course, advocates of bilingual education deny these claims, not only stating that ELLs retain their native language more readily when educated in bilingual environments, but also that they are often more successful in learning English. As researchers from the University of Arizona explained in *Bilingualism for the Children: Implementing a Dual Language Program in an English Only State*: “English language learners are more academically successful (as measured on

⁶¹ House Republican Committee, “Welcoming Immigrants to a Diverse America: English as our Common Language of Mutual Understanding,” (1996). Available: <http://www.englishfirst.org/goppol.htm>

standardized tests in English) when they continue schooling in first language literacy and subject matter throughout the elementary years.”⁶²

Varieties of Bilingual Education

There are a wide variety of programs that fall under the category of bilingual education. Among other variables, the success and quality of any bilingual education programs are affected by the demographics of the students, the skills and training of the teachers in the classroom, the political and historic factors unique to the location of the school in question, and the way that the curriculum addresses language learning issues and language practice. These and many other things must be taken into account when considering any particular bilingual education program.

One of the most important variables in a bilingual classroom setting is the demographic makeup of the student body. Who does bilingual education serve? Bilingual education is often used for students from linguistic minority group, a group that is referred to in the United States as English-language learners, or ELLs.⁶³ Students who primarily speak minority languages are typically immigrants or have been raised in immigrant families, though speakers of minority native or ethnic languages can also fall into this group.

Bilingual education programs are also available for speakers of the majority language. Some of these programs put extra focus on the target (in the US, non-

⁶² Mary Carol Combs, Carol Evans, Todd Fletcher, Elena Parra, and Alicia Jiménez, "Bilingualism for the Children: Implementing a Dual Language Program in an English Only State," University of Arizona (2004)

⁶³ Alec Ian Gershberg, Anne Danenberg, and Patricia Sánchez, Beyond "Bilingual" Education: New Immigrants and Public School Policies in California (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 2004)

English) language in the classroom. Still other programs are what are referred to as a “two-way” language programs, meaning that it they target students from both language groups that are represented in the curriculum. In these settings, students from both groups use both their home language and the new target language to study a range of subjects.

Unlike the other approaches to language education that we’ve discussed, bilingual education is defined by its format in the classroom rather than by its purpose. Therefore, bilingual education can actually support the goals of several of the previous categories of language education. In addition to bilingual or dual language approaches designed to provide second language education to linguistic-minority students or foreign language education to linguistic majority students, there are bilingual programs designed to serve other purposes, such as to introduce students to a dominant international language or to preserve an endangered ethnic language.

Despite the fact that bilingual education can be used for the same purposes as many other types of language education, there are some unique features of bilingual education that distinguish it, making it particularly suitable for certain varieties of language education. Because bilingual education gives the “foreign language” and the “home language” an equal role in the classroom, it is equally suited to members of either linguistic group, making it an ideal environment for fostering understanding. This is especially true if the language program is a two-way model that includes speakers of both languages. At some level then, it is not just language education that is essential, but the opportunity to implement the skills learned during education in the classroom and out.

Two-Way Models of Bilingual Education

As I mentioned in earlier, two-way bilingual language programs are bilingual classrooms that include students from both majority and minority language groups. Two-way programs are unique in that there are two target languages in the classroom: the political or majority language of the country where the program is located, and a minority language. Class time is shared between instruction in each of these two languages. In addition, the presentation of content is coordinated – meaning that a given piece of information or lesson in the classroom will be presented in one language or the other, but not in both.⁶⁴ This means that all students are expected to participate in both languages, and must make use of both languages in order to fully understand the other subjects that are presented in the school. The inclusion of both languages also becomes essential in the school’s administration, including in communication with parents and school announcements.⁶⁵

Another important advantage of this model is the linguistic and cultural diversity that is available among members of the student population. While language learning can help increase our capacity for intercultural understanding, there is a certain point at which we must bring that understanding to the next level by putting ourselves in the position of having to use it in an intercultural environment. Naturally, this is typically thought of as a highly cosmopolitan view. Just as understanding is needed to facilitate intercultural experiences, intercultural experiences are needed to facilitate understanding. In fact, I think that this is the more important direction for this parallel to go – understanding is the essential thing, even outside of the context of

⁶⁴ Castro Feinberg 109

⁶⁵ Castro Feinberg 112

world traveling, and intercultural experiences that take place in the classroom can help us to reach that end.

Language education can be a strong means of facilitating understanding in these intercultural experiences. Yet, intercultural knowledge and learning is enhanced even more if it involves people from different kinds of backgrounds, including different linguistic backgrounds. This occurrence is most accessible in a bilingual classroom, and all but guaranteed in a classroom that uses the two-way dual language model of language learning. In this way, two-way models of bilingual education provide students with access to cultural diversity as well as linguistic diversity.

It may seem from this analysis of diversity in the classroom that it is really cultural diversity among students, rather than inter-linguistic interaction, which makes the difference that we have been seeking. However, I argue that this is not the case. Because of the significance of language specifically that we've discussed, I think that while classroom diversity is important, linguistic diversity and knowledge is equally important in promoting understanding.

The bilingual education setting not only allows for intercultural exchange, it also allows for a sense of equality between different linguistic groups as the classroom environment is not dominated by either language. This allows for schools to avoid problems with cross-cultural communication. Rosa Castro Feinberg explains bilingual teacher's perspective on this issue in a large study of bilingual schools: "When asked if concentrated diversity in linguistic, cultural, and national-origin background created cross-cultural communication problems, the typical response was

that the participants had experienced no problems. They saw diversity as a strength that permitted members of the school community to learn from each other.”⁶⁶

In other words, the format of two-way dual language education programs gives them the potential to help address social imbalances that members of linguistic minority groups must confront by providing a learning environment in which everyone is a language learner. This is especially helpful in situations where some students are working to learn the political language of the region that they are in. This arrangement can level the playing field for, for instance, English-language learners in the United States. This set up offers the advantage of putting English-language learners on even terms academically with native speakers of English. It also places a higher value on the “foreign” language being used in the classroom.

In a two-way bilingual classroom context, the foreign language is not merely at a separate subject to be studied for an hour or two a couple of times each week. Instead it is a central focus of the classroom, a language to use in many situations. In this way, additive education does not necessarily imply that the added language won’t or can’t be utilized widely. It just implies a renewed respect for all of the students’ native languages. The language that is secondary for each individual student is not presented as a replacement for their native language, but a valuable supplement, worthy of equal respect. This equal respect is often represented quite directly, as both languages are often given equal time in the classroom.

⁶⁶ Castro Feinberg 116

In this way, bilingual education programs, and especially two-way language programs, draw on the best elements of ethnic revival language programs and additive foreign and second language approaches. By presenting two languages equally in the classroom, schools reinforce the value of native and endangered languages for all students regardless of their personal ethnic origin. They also enable students to learn a second, more widely spoken language, without labeling that dominant language as superior to other lesser-spoken languages in any way. With new educational ideas introduced during the ethnic revival, bilingual education openly places a high value on a linguistically diverse society. I think therefore think that this language learning format encourages intercultural understanding – whether internationally or domestically – to the greatest and most equitable extent.

In other words, bilingual education approaches culture in a way that runs parallel to the way that it approaches language. Bilingual education sets bilingualism as an ideal, thereby avoiding allowing either language present in the classroom to gain dominance or superiority over the other, as is prone to occurring in second language and “ethnic-revival” situations.

In doing so, bilingual education teaches students to view their own and other languages as different, yet equally valuable, forms of communication. This balance in the presentation of different languages mirrors a balance in the view of culture that is produced. Students educated in two-way bilingual environments learn to approach other cultures in a manner that respects the plurality of perspectives and identities while still maintaining their own identity. Starting with language, students learn to expand this view to their own perspective on culture itself. In this way, bilingual

education uses understanding as a means of bridging that gap between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I am not merely trying to demonstrate in this paper that language education is important. The importance of language learning and teaching can be seen in a variety of different contexts: learning a foreign language can help someone get a job, help her get ahead in business internationally, or allow her to check into hotels or order meals in a foreign country. These are all practical and important reasons that many individuals seek to learn foreign languages; yet reminding you of them is not the goal of this thesis.

No, my goal in writing this thesis is to present one reason why language education is important on an ethical level. I've tried to show here that the foremost value of language is as a tool for cultivating understanding, something which is itself an often overlooked tool for creating beneficial and cooperative intercultural and interpersonal exchanges.

I believe that language education and the intercultural understanding that it develops can inspire students to embrace a view of culture that is neither purely cosmopolitan nor purely multiculturalist, but rather embraces the best elements of each. By embracing language in the classroom we do not merely teach students to communicate effectively. Rather, we teach them that there are a multitude of perspectives in the world, and give them the skills to understand and empathize with others.

Through this thesis I hope to encourage a second look at the importance of language education, and specifically at the potential of two-way models of bilingual

education. Through this kind of education, I believe, we can teach students the skills that ought to be the whole point of education. Learning to speak a language facilitates not only learning to communicate, but also learning to empathize, care, respect, and most importantly, learning to understand.

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