

Cultural Revolutions

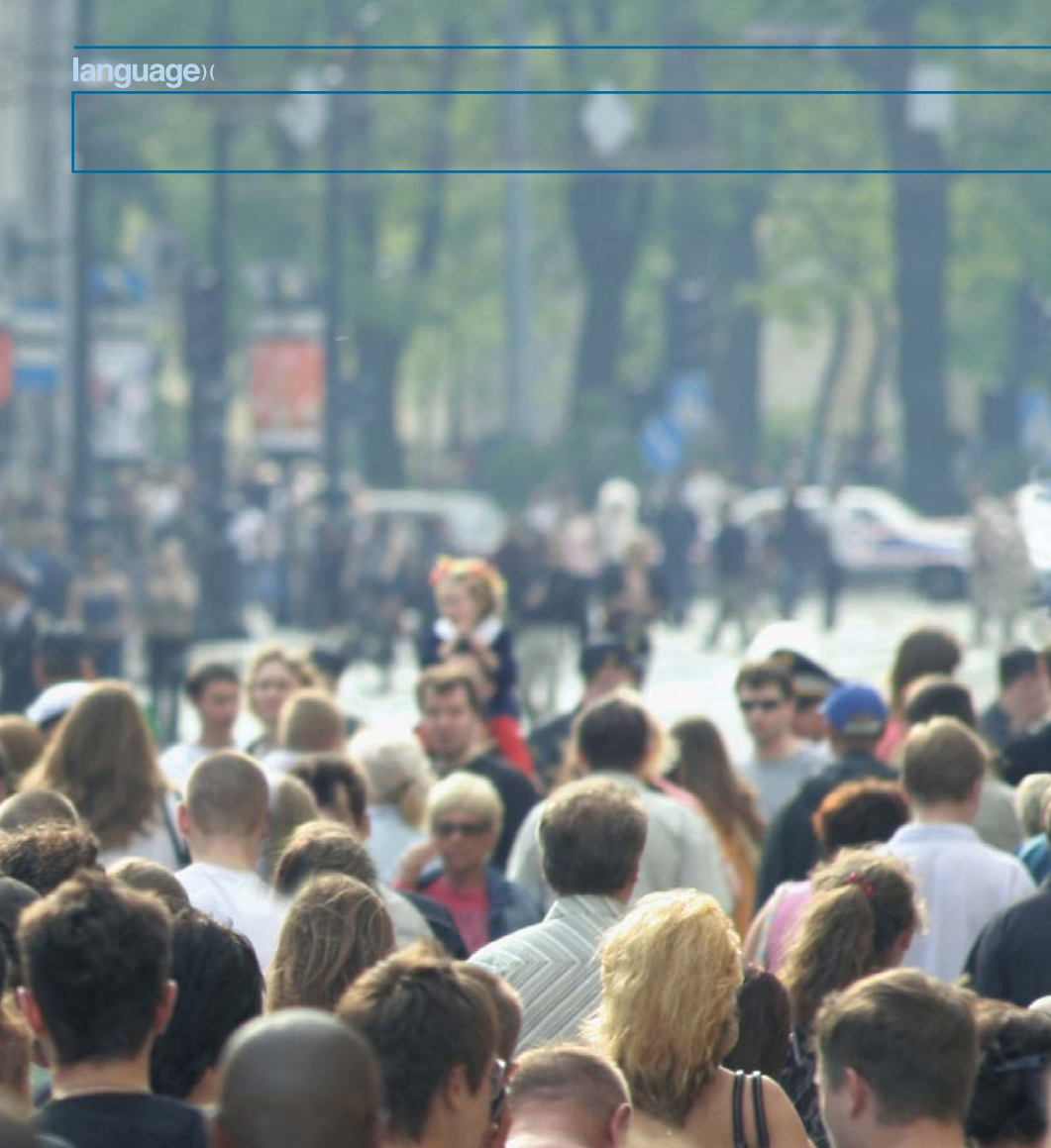
For the past year I have been part of a group of educators interested in embedding the “Seven Revolutions” (7Rs) into our teaching, in an effort to build global competencies and promote cultural literacy. My students are teachers in a Master’s program in TESOL, and most are K-12 teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs). The Seven Revolutions, as identified by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, (www.csis.org), are those factors most likely to impact and revolutionize our world by 2025. They are: population, resource management, technology, information flows, economic integration, conflict, and governance. Each major component of the 7Rs has several sub-components, or foci. Still, this is certainly not an exhaustive list, and it may be argued that other components should be explicitly included, even where they are subsumed within one or more of these elements.

As a teacher of ELL and immigrant students, and as a teacher educator of the same, I am continually looking for ways to make schooling maximally relevant to stu-

dents in ways that validate their linguistic, cultural, and material experience of the world. While many ELLs are born in the U.S., others are immigrants and have often experienced the effects of the Seven Revolutions directly and indirectly — perhaps through war or economic displacement, thus making the study of these issues particularly poignant for these students. However, ELLs should not be, and generally are not, segregated from mainstream classes of students in my teacher educators’ schools. The teacher educators in my graduate classes teach the full spectrum of students across grade levels and English proficiency levels, including in schools using bilingual instructional approaches. Each teacher has embedded one or more of the 7Rs into her teaching over the past year — from kindergarteners studying rules and governance, to fourth-graders studying the water cycle and water conservation, to middle-school students studying global economic integration (an especially timely topic which coincided with the global economic crisis of 2008), to high-school students

studying sustainable energy technologies and global resource management. In each case students used the Seven Revolutions to learn about the world and the ways in which these revolutions impact them directly, as well as the ways in which they impact others across our planet, often in disproportionate measure in terms of negative effects.

Teachers have found that using the framework of the Seven Revolutions has allowed them to not only broaden the scope of what they were already teaching at their grade levels and through their standards, but also to enrich their curricula while building awareness of our interconnectedness (economic, political, environmental, etc.), and the increasingly real meaning of the term “global village.” In one teacher’s school, each student in the eighth grade researched an individual or organization with a positive impact on the world, while examining the fundamental questions “Who am I and what is my impact on the world?” This multi-week unit came under the umbrella topic of “Be the change you want to see in the world,” as



Bernadette Musetti explores how the Seven Revolutions can globalize language classrooms

Gandhi so profoundly counseled.

Teachers focusing on the 7Rs also reported that they were more aware of, and less tied to, traditional and canonical notions of “cultural literacy,” and that they, along with their students, became more culturally aware and responsive. The teacher and student designed 7R curriculum projects were often collaborative, project-based, and involved various technologies, which resulted in promoting multiple intelligences and literacies among students, including technological, linguistic, and social/emotional. Several teachers expressed a desire to continue and expand their projects to include an electronic global learning component where their students would connect with others in different cities or countries, and study a common topic across different contexts (e.g. the meaning of “community,” or local effects of climate change). In many instances, these teachers could be connected with sister classes and their students’ target languages through well-established electronic networks, as described by Jim Cummins and Dennis

Sayers (1997). Finally, in addition to developing language across all four skill areas — reading, writing, listening, speaking, and promoting cultural awareness and a globalized consciousness, teachers reported that students were more engaged in learning because they were both allowed and required to use critical and high-order thinking through focusing on big ideas, to analyze issues from another’s perspective, to see causes and their effects, to draw inferences and propose solutions (the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy — analysis, synthesis, and evaluation).

The U.S. education system has been criticized as woefully inadequate in terms of teaching particular subjects — languages and geography, to name two. Projects embedding the 7Rs can bring a needed focus to these and other areas, while providing a venue for authentic learning tasks, audiences, and assessments. Nearly everything we teach in K-12 schools and higher education can be linked in some way to one or more of the 7 Revolutions. In our present and future world, the value of an

education that promotes a sense of personal and shared responsibility, cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and global citizenship cannot be underestimated. I write this article in the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai terrorism tragedy, which reaffirms for me the very real need for a deeper understanding of our interconnected world, and for effectively and equitably meeting the needs of all students in and through our global classrooms. ❧

References

Cummins, J. and Sayers, D. (1997). *Brave New Schools: Challenging Cultural Illiteracy through Global Learning Networks*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

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