
THE POSITION PAPER

A Pedagogy of Pain: New Directions for World Language Education

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As I am writing this piece, I am highly aware of my privilege as a White, middle class, European woman. I have never had to flee my home, justify my existence, or fear for my life. Although stories of human suffering deeply affect me, my pain is not the pain of those who feel it on their own bodies, minds, lands, and families. I offer this piece as one attempt to stand in solidarity with them and be their ally.

later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.

Warsan Shire 2011

A TIME OF UBIQUITOUS PAIN

In the midst of a series of terrorist attacks in places that included Beirut, Paris, and Bamako in November 2015, these lines from the poem “What they did yesterday afternoon” by the British-Somali writer Warsan Shire circulated widely on social media platforms. It seems to capture a common sentiment: That the pain of violence, destruction, and loss is ubiquitous. The perceived pain of the present time is not purely subjective but can be captured, at least to some degree, in numbers. In June 2015, the United Nations’ Refugee Agency, UNHCR, reported the highest ever recorded number of forcibly displaced people in our world, 59.5 million, as well as the highest increase in this number within one year. With about 980,000 seeking asylum in Europe in 2015 alone, members of the post-WWII generation, like me, have never been confronted with a larger amount of people fleeing war, terror, or persecution. One reason for this sad record is a sharp increase in acts of terrorism worldwide. As John Cassidy explained in the November 2015 issue of *The New Yorker*:

If you have a sense that the problem is growing, you’re right. Last year, the number of people killed by terrorist attacks rose by about eighty per cent, reaching an all-time high of close to thirty-three

thousand. Since 2000, the annual death toll from terrorism has increased ninefold. (Cassidy, 2015, para 2)

Although this rate is still low compared to other threats to human life and well-being, the change not only in quantity but quality of violence has given many pause: With a 172% increase of civilians killed in terrorist attacks (Cassidy, 2015), for many, war and terrorism have ceased to be remote, geographically or personally. Being a civilian and located far from a country that has officially declared war does not necessarily translate into perceived safety and comfort anymore. The relief of distance we might have felt when closing the newspaper or turning off the TV has become less reliable. As thousands of refugees enter Europe and North America, they are bringing—among many other things—reports of death and destruction to places that have previously, problematically, perceived themselves as peaceful and safe. Once arrived, their stories of pain oftentimes continue as they are caught between the political populism and xenophobia that have been bred by this perception and its overt or covert othering of non-European individuals and groups. Media, social media, and immediate contact with refugees have not only permeated the “Fortress Europe,” but also raised critical questions about its ethicality and brought to light cultural conflicts that go deep (thus transforming European identities) and way back (thus rewriting European history). There is no doubt that the future of Europe will depend on how we deal with the enormity and pain of these cultural questions and conflicts.

Within the United States, other kinds of culture wars are being fought that are no less a matter of race and displacement than the European one. To name only one, the #BlackLives-Matter (BLM) movement was officially formed in 2012 after unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman, who was

charged with murder but acquitted in 2013. The deadly shooting caused a wave of public protests and a petition to arrest Zimmerman was signed by over 1.3 million. Since then, the movement has brought vital attention to Black lives which are being destroyed as a result of extrajudicial killings committed by police, vigilantes, and White supremacists. Miriam Carey, Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Michael Brown Jr., Ezell Ford, Dante Parker, Tanisha Anderson, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Romain Brisbon, Jerame Reid, Tony Robinson, Philipp White, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Cynthia Hurd, Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Daniel Simmons Sr., Myra Thompson, Bettie Jones, Quintonio LeGrier, among many others, have followed Trayvon Martin on the list of unarmed Black people who were killed in confrontations with police officers or on the ground of racist motives.¹ When supporters of the BLM movement across the United States organize protests to demand justice and offer spaces for collective mourning and comfort, and these spaces are, again, destroyed in racially motivated crimes, as it happened when White supremacists shot protesters in Minneapolis, MN, the pain is multiplied by the exponentiated injustice and violence: Not only do the killings of and violence against people of color happen with a regularity that leaves us little time to process the atrocities, even the spaces created to begin to heal and claim the most basic rights for justice and safety have come under attack. These conflicts concern the very core of who we are collectively and individually, as scholars, language educators, but most importantly, as human beings. These conflicts delimit what we believe in, what we strive for, where we belong, and how we live. Therefore, they are fundamentally cultural in nature.

In World Language (WL) education, what we have commonly termed ‘culture’ is far removed from the heaviness of such events. This is not to say that the development of culture teaching has stagnated. We have moved beyond numerous restrictive ideas in our field. For example, although this approach is still alive and well in some contexts (e.g., Garza, 2010), many of us (e.g., Kramsch, 1993) have acknowledged the importance of teaching culture not only as ‘fifth skill’ in addition to reading, writing, speaking, and listening or as preventive of cultural “faux pas” which cause “little cultural stumbles” (Garza, 2010) that help learners notice, attend to, and appreciate cultural differences. Instead, we acknowledge that “[i]n

the best language education happening today, the study of another language is synonymous with the study of another culture” (Cutshall, 2012, p. 32). We have understood the intertwinedness of “big C” (formal) Culture and “little c” (everyday) culture and even described them as “inseparable” (NSFLEP, 2006, p. 48).

We might not only know about the concept of culture as a triangle of products, practices, and perspectives (Cutshall, 2012), we might even understand the importance of focusing more on perspectives to remedy cultural education that has become too “light”. We seem to be in consensus about the goal to overcome a “Four Fs approach” to teaching culture that focuses on food, fashion, folklore, and festivals (Banks, 2002). With the communicative approach becoming the widely accepted standard for language education, we might even have problematized cultural biases of language practices in our classrooms. We have explored how teachers integrated multicultural curriculum in WL classrooms (e.g., Bigelow, Wesely, & Opsahl, 2009), aimed to understand and support development of our learners’ cultural sensitivity (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003), and even promoted “culture as the core” (Lange & Paige, 2003) of WL education. Individual scholars have also problematized “cultural difference” (Kubota, 2004) and critically analyzed textbooks (e.g., Herman, 2007; Zavadil Kovács, 2009) in and for WL contexts.

We might be addressing cultural differences and similarities in everyday routines of different cultural communities and draw parallels between festivities and the perspectives they represent—even in ways that are dynamic and complex. We compare public transportation systems and what constitutes a healthy diet and, in doing so, are likely to meet the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLEP, 2006) or World Readiness Standards for Language Learning (NSCB, 2015). Yet we don’t get our hands too dirty. We rarely, if at all, read articles about BLM protestors and consider their trauma of losing a community or family member. We don’t habitually engage in conversations about past and present displacement and devastation that continue to happen locally and globally. We don’t usually listen to stories of escaping war and finding refuge as well as racism in a new land, despite the fact that these events occur in settings where so many of the languages taught in classrooms around the world are spoken.

Despite the long way we have come, we are still reducing culture to something light, curious, and often pleasantly amusing that barely challenges our identities and beliefs. It is telling

that Global Competence as defined by ACTFL in 2014 includes no mention of critical reevaluation of one's own perspectives, values, and identities. Even if the goal of "examining one's own perspective as similar to or different from the perspective of people with whom one is interacting" (ACTFL, 2014, para 8) might, coincidentally, spark such a process, in all likelihood this type of cultural comparison will only scratch the very surface of cultural conflict—enough to allow us to claim cosmopolitan identities or cultural competence and distinguish us from those who still commit cultural faux pas (as if that were a criterion for cultural insidership or competence), but not enough to cause us investment or inconvenience.

To sum up, we exist in a world where we are surrounded and affected by intense cultural conflicts, where we acknowledge the critical role of 'global competence' in WL education, where we design materials and conduct research to improve culture teaching, yet the cultural conflicts and pain we are experiencing today do not seem to make it into our language classrooms. Quite the opposite, it seems that in WL education, we have taken the taboo, the dark sides, the pain out of culture. In the current world, where "it hurts everywhere," even the most remote and sporadic consumer of world and local news finds it impossible to remain only superficially affected by the fear, uncertainty, and pain that interrupts our otherwise often too comfortable European–American life. In the face of ubiquitous pain, how do we bridge the gap between what we feel and what we teach? How are we as language and culture teachers and teacher educators, quite literally, affected? Does ubiquitous pain have to concern our teaching? What danger lies in the return to 'culture light' and the compliance with silence?

THE DANGER OF SILENCE

In his TED talk *The Danger of Silence*, poet and educator Clint Smith says:

Every day, all around us, we see the consequences of silence manifest themselves in the form of discrimination, violence, genocide and war. In the classroom, I challenge my students to explore the silences in their own lives through poetry. We work together to fill those spaces, to recognize them, to name them, to understand that they don't have to be sources of shame. (Smith, 2014, para 2)

In these few words, Smith says two things that are critical: First, silence creates discrimination, violence, genocide, and war. We could also say silence creates cultural conflict and pain, which

makes breaking the silence our ethical responsibility. Second, Smith shows that breaking the silence in the classroom is possible—he is doing it!—and can be a collaborative act of teachers and students who engage in creative processes. In the context of WL education, Osborn has addressed the danger of silences that tend to occur when current events that touch upon sensitive issues are excluded from the classroom or curriculum:

"Why should it *concern* us?" a reader may inquire. If language education were to be affected by currently political events, one could reason we would indubitably be hurt. Certainly the anti-German hysteria almost a century ago in the United States affected German language enrollments and programs negatively. Granted. But a greater danger looms, I contend, in that the comparative silence serves as evidence of a much greater hazard; namely, that world language education in the United States has become largely extraneous to the national dialogue. Students who eventually become adult residents of the United States may see absolutely no connection between their world language-learning experiences and their daily lives. (Osborn, 2006, p. 2)

Osborn (2006) acknowledges that an inclusion of current, sensitive topics in the WL curriculum may pose potential threats to the discipline, but reasons that it is essential if WL instruction is to remain relevant. Although Osborn's point is certainly valid, I suggest rearranging the order of his argument. Do current events concern us mainly because we worry about WL education being relevant? Or is it rather the case that current events are highly relevant for us as individuals, communities, and societies, and therefore need to concern us also in WL classrooms? At a later point, when he talks about inquiry-based approaches for teaching language and social justice, Osborn makes a much bolder statement about the very personal way in which community-based issues, including conflicts and oppression, impact us and the whole discipline:

We must recognize the impact that our own power and privilege have on our construction of social reality, and explore ways in which we can move to change that reality to reflect a socially just one. Inquirers must question the nature of education, the importance and necessary and sufficient conditions for democratic society, and their own roles in the process both individually and as a collective whole. Indeed such reflections should eventually command the attention of the field. (Osborn, 2006, p. 65)

His plea to recognize the field's privileging—and each of our own privileges and places in positions of power—shows the high level of

investment Osborn calls for. And although Osborn seems to get to the same place eventually, Smith has been there all along: His starting point is one of being affected by social and political conflict—not unlike this very piece. This is not a coincidence: As someone who writes, teaches, and acts in the presence of culture wars, Smith's actions are the result of his experience of pain and conflict. When "it hurts everywhere," we can't be overly concerned with what our discipline might need. Instead, we are called to draw on the pain we witness and the pain we experience to break dangerous silences and transform our teaching. Especially White middle class educators with European heritage, like me, are called on to ready themselves to be unsettled if they consider breaking the danger of silence. Motha (2014) speaks to this point. In her analysis of silences around issues of race, she describes mitigations, omissions, and dilutions of racial discourses, offering as an explanation that White complicity in racial injustices motivates the silence:

How does one proceed through life with the awareness that one is living alongside a people who were enslaved, robbed, raped, conquered, or murdered by members of the group you identify with and belong to? One way is to seek erasure of these group identities and to claim that racial categories no longer carry meaning nor produce material consequences, as they did in the past. (Motha, 2014, pp. 82–83)

Motha's analysis of silences around race also applies to silences around cultural conflict and pain: The White European/American way of erasing pain from education, in effect, erases the identities of individuals and groups who experience it with the objective of maintaining pain-free, convenient instruction, education, and lifestyles. From this erasure arises an obligation, especially for White European educators, to counter silences with stories of cultural conflict and pain. Or, as White allies spelled it out on their banners at Justice4Jamar protests in Minnesota shopping malls in December 2015: "White silence costs lives" (BLM Minneapolis, 2015).

In all, the reasons for being concerned, for letting stories of pain and loss affect us and our students, are multiple: They are located within our disciplines (because we want to remain relevant and attract students), within our social responsibilities (because we aim to address injustices and prepare critical and active citizens), within our moral aspirations (because we hope to do things 'right' and include ourselves in the search for healing and peace), and within our emotional experience of reality (because we share the pain that

we witness and look for ways to process it that create meaning and hope).

If our response to our world that is hurt and plagued by intense culture wars cannot be to keep presenting familiar and "thinking-light" (Martel, 2016) content and we cannot remain silent about the painful human experiences we see "everywhere," how do we integrate them with WL curricula and instruction without functionalizing either of them? What do current approaches of culture teaching have to offer?

THE ASSUMED UNAFFECTEDNESS OF CURRENT APPROACHES

What tools do we have as WL teachers and teacher educators to break silences, address taboos, and bring painful stories of cultural conflict into our classrooms? Not many, is the honest answer. In fact, the scarcity of academic publications and available teaching materials that motivate and guide scholars and practitioners to an integration of cultural conflict with the foreign language curriculum is striking.

Mentioned before, Osborn's seminal book *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice* carefully considers the context of foreign language education in the United States, including a critical analysis of dominant language policies and ideologies, and offers practical ideas for intertwining language with social justice education. Although his work is ground-breaking in the sense that it calls WL educators and scholars to end their complicity with market-driven, culturally indifferent, or elitist ideologies on WL learning, it does not deliver the urgency that we experience in the face of culture conflict. In other words, it does not address pain. This is also true for *Words and Actions*, a valuable and recent publication for world language teachers, in which Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell (2014) present methods for teaching language and social justice. Drawing on Nieto's (2010) definition of social justice as "a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (p. 46), they give hands-on examples of critical thinking and acting in the WL classroom that are certainly a valuable and important contribution to the field.

The issue I take with both of these otherwise extremely helpful pieces of literature is that they, like the World Readiness Standards, the product-practices-perspectives approach, and other tools for culture teaching, assume unaffectedness and distance as a starting point with cultural topics. However, with the conflict and pain that

surrounds us, we often find ourselves immediately affected and deeply shaken. I argue that we must find ways and approaches to tap into this pain and unsettling to teach language and social justice together. I would, as a matter of fact, go even one step further and argue that we have to look for the pain and unsettling within our WL curriculum and instruction in order to adequately address what happens around us. Similar suggestions have been made by scholars in related fields who have called for an emphasis of “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 2000), “dark knowledge” (Zipin, 2009), and “funds of difficult knowledge” (Becker, 2014), while also problematizing what is deemed “dark” or “difficult” in our educational contexts.

Framing the painful experiences of our time as cultural conflict brings a gamut of tools into the arena that have established a status of considerable popularity and frequentness when cultural content is addressed and intercultural competence is the objective in WL classrooms. As mentioned earlier, as language educators, we are encouraged to balance ‘big C’ and ‘little c’ cultural content and address the components of culture laid out by the World Readiness Standard on Culture: products, practices, and perspectives (PPP). In the face of displaced refugees who suffer shipwreck on the Mediterranean, what would we consider big C Culture and what would be little c culture? What about this disaster can be qualified as “everyday routine,” what about it is part of long-lasting cultural accomplishments? Doesn’t the question itself fail to capture the situation and, in fact, seem cynical? What should we consider to be an appropriate product or practice in a cultural conflict like a deadly shooting of a Black person by a public official? How do we go about identifying it and with what purpose? Even if we had identified appropriate products and practices, how could we analyze perspectives that are represented by such products and practices, when so many of them seem to originate from chaos, hatred, and affect? The application of existing tools for culture education does not only seem impossible, it can be counterproductive. For example, the PPP framework is problematic because it assumes cultural distance between students and teachers and the people and content represented in the materials. In a world that is in pain, the immediacy and relevance that products, practices, and perspectives aim to bring to the WL classroom is already there: It is in the pain we feel when we are confronted with stories of conflict. Thus, in addition to being an inappropriate objectification of human suffering,

the application of the framework would create an emotional and intellectual distance to suffering humans. Instead, I contend, we should work with what is most immediate and available: pain.

The witnessing of violence, war, terrorism, and persecution have fundamentally unsettled the very core of our belief systems: What we thought humans should and could do, what we thought was right and wrong, what we thought was real or not real—all of it is open for reinterpretation. With questions of this magnitude and immediacy, common pedagogical tools are bound to be insufficient. An adequate pedagogical and curricular response will include pain, and by this I mean a deliberate and systematic engagement with themes that are uncomfortable, taboo, or suppressed, for the benefit of thinking and acting towards social justice.

PAIN AS A FOUNDATION OF A NEW APPROACH TO WL EDUCATION

To understand what this might entail and why this is a meaningful endeavor, we need to understand some important characteristics of pain:

- (a) Pain is a precursor of investment. Although pain can spark withdrawal and seclusion, it is in itself an act of engagement, even if a momentary one: Being affected and being connected go hand in hand and can be maintained within the WL classroom. In addition to leveraging the pain of crisis moments, which tends to come into our scope of notice unannounced and suddenly, we can tap the immediate pre-investment of pain for all culture learning in WL contexts, releasing new levels of student engagement and deep understanding of sensitive issues.
- (b) Pain can be subversive. It makes us question our truths and frames of reference. In this characteristic lies the potential to see beyond our own realities. The pain of empathy problematizes our own comfort, safeness, and well-being along with the unjust structures that have created wealth and well-being for some and fear and loss for others. Such subversive forces are critical for social justice education that, by definition, seek change and transformation. As students acquire a new language, they can “learn culture” by deconstructing and reconstructing themselves and their environment as a consequence of pain.

- (c) Pain seeks outlets. It allows and often pushes us and our students to express our vulnerability and to carve out spaces for solidarity and healing, thus creating the possibility for humane responses to inhumane experiences. Language is the tool to do all that. If integrated, working through pain and language learning can form a powerful foundation for pedagogy and curriculum to drive authentic language use, healing, empathy, altruism, and thus social and personal change.

Of course, pain can also be unpredictable and destructive. Painful content does not usually ask to be integrated. Instead, it tends to enter our lives and classrooms unexpectedly, which constitutes a considerable part of its nature. It also does not usually lend itself well to what is deemed “appropriate” for language education. It is often unwieldy and complex, sometimes graphic, usually emotionally draining or at least troubling. It is rarely neat and unambiguous and often contested and controversial; and yet, the danger of excluding it is greater than the risk of including it.

Letting pain into our classrooms is a courageous act. My goal here is to initiate a discussion on how to cultivate pain for WL education to a degree that maintains these characteristics while also engaging it in productive and constructive work that integrates education for social justice with language learning.

Teaching (Through) Pain

As I am making an argument for a pedagogy of pain, my call is not to abandon the tools for WL and culture teaching that already exist. In fact, a pedagogy of pain could complement our existing methods in important ways and fill them with the investment, urgency, and authenticity the current experience of ubiquitous pain warrants. Without claiming completeness, I am offering three elements of teaching (through) pain as well as examples from my own practice.

Becoming Vulnerable While Planning Painful Lessons. Given our human tendency to avoid pain and reduce risk, this notion seems counter-intuitive and thus needs practice and support. I am arguing that rather than growing a thick skin that makes us insensitive to human suffering and struggle, we need to discover vulnerability as source of strength—and curriculum design. A first step toward identifying painful content is to turn our attention to what is presented in

negative ways or left out. We must ask ourselves: What is absent? Who resides in the margins, footnotes, and outs? Who is described in derogatory language? Who is tokenized and stereotyped? Having identified some initial answers, we then need to attend to our own discomfort and become personal: What about this causes me to be uncomfortable? What is the origin of the pain? As a third step, the identified content is reflected through one’s own identities and privilege: How have I benefitted from unjust systems? What silences around this topic have I been complicit in or vocal about? What consequences do my silences or engagement with this issue have? Such questions can then be acknowledged and defined more clearly in unit and lesson objectives that derive concrete and measurable or observable processes from the rather abstract notion of learning social justice. Put differently, a pedagogy of pain needs to manifest itself in social justice objectives in our lesson plans.

Maintaining Painful Conversations. Once the pain in a topic has been identified, it is crucial to teach through it rather than around it. In his book *Courageous Conversations about Race*, Glenn Singleton (2015) provides a definition of Courageous Conversations that is also helpful for maintaining painful content in language classrooms. According to Singleton, a Courageous Conversation “engages those who won’t talk,” “sustains the conversation when it gets uncomfortable or diverted,” and “deepens the conversation to the point where authentic understanding and meaningful actions occur” (p. 26, emphasis removed). It is not a big stretch to apply this definition to learning activities in world language contexts. In fact, these definitions could relatively easily be turned into social justice as well as language objectives: Students could be provided with language as well as strategies to invite multiple controversial perspectives into a conversation, express and react to uncomfortable emotions, monitor their and others’ understanding, and plan and engage in activism.

Goals for the WL learners could be to be able—linguistically and socially—to encourage each other’s participation and engagement, move into and out of silences, ask difficult and even unanswerable questions, and transition from thinking to acting for social change. Such conversations and silences should not be reserved for advanced and older students. They are not something we need to hold off on until our students are ‘ready.’ While hardly anyone will ever be ready for the pain of cultural conflicts, appropriate linguistic

and socio-emotional scaffolding is important in the WL classroom to make the dark sides of culture intellectually, linguistically, and emotionally tangible to our students.

Promoting Transformation. When we seek out and thematize the pain in WL classrooms, we engage in a process that is transformative. Our ways of thinking, speaking, and acting will be changed by a pedagogy of pain. Transformation is in no way secondary to or ensuing from (a) sensitization and (b) courageous conversations and silences but should be continuously supported throughout the learning experience. In fact, transformation could also be a starting point for locating and addressing the pain of cultural conflicts. Whenever a transformation occurs, it needs to be supported with language, modeling, and concrete strategies.

Some aspects of transformative education have been outlined within the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which was originally developed for adults by Jack Mezirow (1978) and has been developed since by several scholars (for an overview, see Baumgartner, 2001). WL educators can claim and adapt this framework for the purposes of integrating language and social justice education. For example, Mezirow outlined the process of transformative learning in 10, later 11 (Mezirow, 1991), phases. Although transformation is hardly as linear, rational, and simple as his original model suggests, some of the steps apply to a pedagogy of pain, such as the experience of “a disorienting dilemma” (phase 1), “a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions” (phase 3), “exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions” (phase 5), “building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships” (phase 9), and “a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective” (phase 10) (Mezirow, 1978).

One key step in transformative learning processes seems to be the adoption of new roles and relationships into one’s life reality. In a context like WL education, what might this entail? New roles and relationships for our students could be the ones of allies, protesters, challengers, visionaries, friends, accomplices, power donors—in other words, all kinds of roles and relationships that enable them to participate in public discourses as critical and justice-oriented agents of change. As such, they will also be readers, writers, speakers, and listeners, which makes the WL classroom an ideal place for the exploration and practicing of new roles and relationships. If we take these new

roles and relationships seriously, new languages need to find their way into the WL classroom: languages of disobedience and protest, languages of courage and boldness, languages of vulnerability and pain, languages of desire and demand, to name only a few. In short, we need languages of change to enter WL education.

Healing Without a Taffeta Bow

In the WL classroom, pain should not be the end (but I am not arguing for a pain-free conclusion either). Although it is necessary for students, teachers, and teacher educators to experience and address pain in the WL classroom so they can understand their own as well as new cultures more deeply and transform their words and actions, the ultimate goal is to make a contribution toward healing and justice. When we talk about healing, I suggest keeping Leigh Patel’s words in mind that she offered as her Facebook status the day after no one was indicted in the jail death case of Sandra Bland:

Three times yesterday, I was part of conversation wondering why there is such an unrelenting clamor for ‘hope.’ Why, for example, Ta-Nehisi Coates’ work is so roundly lauded and then bemoaned because he doesn’t wrap his poetic analysis of centuries of plunder in some kind of taffeta bow.

The morning after the nonindictment in the death of Sandra Bland, Black people, and today most specifically Black women, are asked again to reconcile their humanness with a nation that exonerates itself and re-asserts its patriarchal authority to take life with impunity. They are asked to do this each time they enter a space that doesn’t acknowledge the nation’s deep chasm between word and deed and that plunders merrily along with its distorted image of itself as the land of opportunity.

I’d rather that we spent time learning about actual projects of marronage, fugitivity, flight, and resistance than the decidedly flat, forced peal of hope.

(Patel, December 22, 2015)

As Patel eloquently suggests, dissolving our pain and investment in comfortable hope that covers up the deep and life-threatening injustices in our here and now, the dark sides of cultural conflicts, would mean to become complicit in acts of oppression and plunder. The goal of WL education thus needs to keep the wounds open and continue to feel the pain of the world around us, not to paralyze us, but to resist the temptation for taffeta bows and happy endings. Certainly, a life of open wounds is not a comfortable one, as Warsan

Shire—we come back to her and her work again—has stated in an interview:

Not everyone is okay with living like an open wound. But the thing about open wounds is that, well, you aren't ignoring it. You're healing; the fresh air can get to it. It's honest. You aren't hiding who you are. You aren't rotting. People can give you advice on how to heal without scarring badly. But on the other hand there are some people who'll feel uncomfortable around you. Some will even point and laugh. But we all have wounds.

(Rasheed, 2012)

Open wounds, Shire suggests, will prevent us from social dementia and ignorance. They remind us of what caused the wound and will help us heal, although never completely. Scars will remain as a sign that the pain has forever transformed us. Above all, open wounds will reveal who we are, keep us from “rotting” and invite reactions from our fellow humans to be part of the healing process in one way or another. If we take Shire's words to heart, what can we do in order to encourage ourselves, each other, and our students to keep living “like an open wound”? We can keep looking for the painful in our lessons. We can equip students with strategies to notice pain, admit pain, and put pain into words. We can teach them to see beyond the comfort of naive and forgetful hope and choose their words and actions accordingly. In other words, in addition to a communicative approach to WL education, we need to cultivate a critical, courageous, compassionate one. No taffeta bow.

NOTE

¹ For an interactive database of people killed by police in the United States throughout 2015 and 2016, visit <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database#>.

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THE COMMENTARIES

Equity, Access, and Social Justice: From Pain to Possibility

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The pendulum of world language teaching methods in the United States starts swinging at explicit grammar instruction, arcs over to a focus on proficiency and acquisition, and comes back again, with most teachers (and teaching methods) positioning themselves somewhere in between, with the tacit assumption that knowledge of the language is the final goal. However, there are some movements in our field that can shift the course of this back-and-forth swing: a focus on culture, or academic content, perhaps. But the pendulum keeps swinging, with the shifts staying in the margin, rarely affecting how most world language teachers define their main goals.

We believe that a change needs to happen, a seismic shift, and one intended to fundamen-

tally change world language education. In this, we echo Ennsner–Kananen’s call for reform of world language education in *A Pedagogy of Pain*. We believe that issues of social justice in society can and should be regularly addressed by world language teachers in their classrooms, not as an incidental, ad hoc part of classroom life, but as a central, driving force to the enterprise of teaching language. As stated by Claire Kramersch (2014), the world for which students need to be prepared requires “a more reflective, interpretive, historically grounded, and politically engaged pedagogy” (p. 98). World language teachers can, as Sonia Nieto (2010) articulates in her definition of social justice education, “challenge, confront, and disrupt misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes