

INTERCULTURAL TWINNINGS IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: EXAMPLE OF A MATCH BETWEEN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS.

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Abstract

At University of Quebec in Montreal (Quebec, Canada), an inventive project has allowed thousands of French learners, as well as students in education, social science and psychology to learn from each other.

For a twinning to take place, there must be two teachers willing to prioritize contact over cursus details, teachers who believe that hands-on experience will bring a rich and irreplaceable dimension to learning. Classes are then matched, students paired, and a project serving both language learning and academic objectives is structured.

Second language learners need to practice and interact in authentic situations in order to engage and integrate, less they remain formal class speakers, isolated from participation in society. On the other hand, future actors in education and other fields need to experience the reality of today's multilingual and multicultural environment as they will be called to integrate this knowledge into their professional practice. In intercultural twinings, both groups learn from one another in a win-win experience where equality, collaboration and reciprocity are key.

When groups meet together, intergroup relationships can improve provided a certain set of conditions are met. These parameters include equal status of participants, cooperation within the frame of the activity and institutional support (Schofield, 2004).

The twinings serve class objectives: on the one hand learning oral, written and pragmatic skills through authentic exposure; on the other, appreciating the cultural dimensions of education and other fields through authentic contact. The twinning activities can take on different shapes, moulding themselves to academic objectives and logistic constraints.

Intercultural twinings serve five objectives : 1) to make students aware of intercultural diversity; 2) to encourage immigrant students to practice their language of adoption with native or near-native speakers; 3) to empower future professionals in social work, education, careerology and psychology to help meet the challenges faced by Quebec and other Canadian provinces as host societies; 4) to develop skills specific to a particular field of study, be it FSL or social work; and 5) to encourage interdepartmental collaboration in a university context.

Yearly, the Canadian province of Quebec receives 50 000 immigrants of different origins. Half this population does not speak French when arriving but must soon become fluent enough in the Official language of to integrate socially and professionally. This is how they come to enroll in courses at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), an urban francophone university which offers a wide variety of programs including a Certificate in French as a second language (FSL). Many teachers and professors at UQAM organise twinning activities to match FLS learner with students from education, career orientation or social work programs. The aim is to facilitate the integration of immigrant students while honing up intercultural skills amongst future social actors. The teachers and professors who participate in twinning projects believe that if allophones and francophones are to avoid tensions and build a society together, they must open up to each other and become aware of what the Other can bring to the common good.

Based on an approach encouraging contact between different cultures, (Amireault & Lussier, 2008), twinings highlight the social engagement of a university which strives to build bridges between cultural groups, to train interculturally competent workers and to build an inclusive society (Carignan, Deraïche & Guillot, 2015).

Intercultural twinings such as those taking place in our institution also enable participants to develop sociolinguistic competence which refers to the "use of language in its sociocultural aspects"¹, following the principles of the action-oriented approach recommended by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Deeper in its scope than the commonly practiced linguistic twinning, the intercultural twinning allows for an exchange between culture carriers.

The proposed talk will focus on a twinning that paired students of a second language writing class with students of a teacher-training education class. First, the conceptual framework will be presented (objectives, approach, intercultural competence), then the twinning's practical steps will be described, and lastly, the results will be discussed. Results were compiled from participant questionnaires which included both multiple choice and open questions. The questionnaires reveal how students receive the experience and what they learn from it, and provide information on the activity's strengths and weaknesses.

Note: the communication will be given in french.

Keywords : Twining, intercultural, teaching, french as a second language

Brief biography of each author

Marie-Cécile Guillot, Senior Lecturer, is the Head of the Language Department (École de langues) of University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) since 2011. A tenured *Maitre de langue* since 2004, she has acquired a solid experience in teaching French as a second language. She specializes in teaching Writing but also has a keen interest in higher education administration. She has hosted twinings in her classrooms for over a decade and has played a vital role in solidifying institutional support for the initiative.

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¹ CEFR, Éditions Didier, 2010, page18