

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

for a special issue of *L2 Journal*

### **HISTORY AND MEMORY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY**

Language teachers nowadays are confronted more than ever with the question of how to teach “culture” in their language classes. *The Modern Language Journal* has recently devoted yet again a special *Perspectives* section to this issue (Byrnes 2010). But culture is mostly dealt with ahistorically, not as a speech community’s historical memories and remembrances. The many commemoration events in the cultures we teach as well as the many literary and non-literary texts we teach in our language classes confront us with the necessity to refer to, explain, discuss the remembrance of historical events that our students are not familiar with. From which perspective should language teachers give these events significance? Unlike historical events encountered in a literature or history class, that are taught in an objective manner from multiple perspectives, in communicative language teaching, historical events live in the embodied memories of teachers and learners who have experienced these events themselves or learned about them in many different and sometimes incompatible ways. Indeed foreign language teachers and students have often been schooled in a different way of interpreting historical events (see Wertsch 2002). For example, American youngsters have been schooled in a different view of WWII than German youngsters. How are American teachers of German expected to teach Borchert’s short story *Das Brot*, if they can’t get the students to empathize with the plight of Germans after the war?

Furthermore, interpretations of history might be different if the teacher is a native or a non-native speaker, has been schooled abroad or in the U.S., is of this or that generation, of this or that political conviction. He/she might put the accents differently, give reasons that might sound biased, use a discourse that might even feel un-American to American students. History and memory are profoundly linked to emotions and moral values (Kramersch 2009). Foreign language teachers whose professional status is vulnerable to consumer displeasure and budget cuts or whose visitor status holds them to a visitor’s politeness might be hesitant to present to American students a vision of history that might be different from their own. These teachers might be reluctant to teach any kind of text that would raise historical controversy and make the students ‘uncomfortable’.

*L2 Journal* solicits pedagogical reports, empirical studies or think pieces on “History and memory in foreign language study” that address any of the following questions:

- *Which role should history play in foreign language study?*
- *The MLA Report (2007) advocates teaching a foreign culture’s ‘cultural narrative’. What if there are multiple, conflictual narratives in any one nation? How does the teacher know which one to choose? How can FL teachers mediate various interpretations of history in the classroom?*
- *Should foreign language teachers adopt a neutral attitude vis-à-vis historical events? Should they adopt the perspective of mainstream American media or of the target culture’s mainstream media?*

- *In a globalized world, national histories are intertwined, commemorative events in one country elicit historical parallels and comparisons with other countries. Should FL teachers draw links between historical events of the target culture and events from U.S. history?*
- *How have you, as a native or non-native teacher, dealt with the representation of historical events in textbooks or class readings?*
- *Should teachers separate the objective historical accounts of history books and the subjective memories of those who remember the events? Is the one more trustworthy than the other?*
- *Can the 'negotiation of meaning' called for by communicative language teaching be extended to include the negotiation of different interpretations of history?*
- *What theoretical resources would help language teachers deal with the historical/ideological dimensions of the texts they have their students read?*

Please submit a 300-word abstract by **March 15, 2011**. First drafts due **September 15, 2011** for a special issue of *L2 Journal* (early 2012).

### **References**

- Byrnes, Heidi. 2010. Revisiting the role of culture in the foreign language curriculum. *Modern Language Journal* 94:2, 315- 336.
- Kramsch, Claire. 2009. *The Multilingual Subject. What foreign language learners say about their experience and why it matters*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. 2007. Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World. *Profession* 2007, 234-245.
- Wertsch, James. 2002. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.