

## **Maximizing Connections Between LAC Sections and English-language Recitations**

LAC WORKSHOP 03/07/2007

by D. Seth Murray

There are ways to maximize connections between foreign language LAC section and main English language prior to the start of the semester, as well as during the course of the class. Much of what is done prior to the start of class involves the structure of the course, and as such, depends on the guidelines and syllabus provided to you by the main course instructor. The following suggestions pertain to these conceptual/organizational strategies:

### **1. LAC sections should not conflate or substitute language-instruction goals for the existing instructional goals of the general course.**

Although LAC participants will probably obtain linguistic gains, LAC recitation sections should focus on content rather than linguistic form, since linguistic gains do not figure in the evaluation of student performance. You must make sure that LAC activities and events such as term papers or class reports, consistently serve the educational goals of the general course. This is paramount if you want to maintain and privilege connections to English language recitation sections.

### **2. Choose materials based on their linguistic and cultural authenticity but most importantly for their relevance to course content.**

You should look closely at the required readings for the general course to find instances and passages that you might include (or refer to) in LAC assignments. These can provide a context for the LAC-specific material. In this way, LAC participants can more readily relate what they learn in their weekly LAC meetings to the rest of the content of the course, and share their insights with the professor and with other students in the course. For example, are the learning objectives for the topic that week easily met? Or are they complicated, higher-order materials? The conceptual difficulty in English directly affects the level and amount of reading/preparation in the target language. This is a time when it's perhaps useful to read some of the same source material in both languages (for example, Marx in German, Bourdieu in French, etc..., since for 100 and 200 level courses, these scholars can present challenges for 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year undergraduates) or alternatively, perhaps read a foreign-language review of the English language material/author.

Do NOT use materials specially written for language students or non-native audiences. In particular, you should avoid language textbooks, which usually contain only highly edited and sometimes very unauthentic materials. If you do find something in a language text that seems authentic, use it in its original published form if at all possible. "Dumbing" down the LAC materials is a guaranteed way to weaken or lose connections with the English-language recitation sections.

### **3. LAC sections should match the assignments to the appropriate place in the English course syllabus, or at least to take topics up in the same order they come up in the course.**

When you cannot do exactly this, you should at least strive for a logical progression from assignment to assignment. You should try to make the LAC experience cumulative and coherent, whether topically or regionally.

As you discuss new materials, always relate their contents back to previous assignments and, if possible, to the contents of forthcoming assignments. It's easier to keep track of where you are when you think periodically about where you've been and where you're going.

### **OTHER QUESTIONS/ISSUES:**

1. Can some non-English readings be included in your syllabus as recommended or substitute required reading? In this way you can make the potential use and value of materials in languages other than English visible to all students from the outset.
2. Check with the general course instructor to see if topics treated in LAC assignments can be mentioned or introduced during lectures. For example, it is validating if the professor mentions case studies from the LAC materials that are pertinent to the general course, and this link can be reinforced or follow-up during discussion in LAC section.
3. Can LAC participants (or small groups of students) periodically or regularly summarize for the class as a whole what they have learned on a given topic in their LAC study-group discussions? Can this even be incorporated into LAC syllabus as a graded course assignment?
4. Can multiple choice or essay questions from the LAC materials substitute some questions in the quizzes and exams of the general course (with the questions and sample answers provided by the LAC TA)? This of course would require the pre-approval of the course instructor, but would validate the relevance of the materials specifically addressed in LAC section.
5. Are there particular texts or types of texts which, when read in the original language, provide an insight into the subject that cannot be achieved through reading a translation? Are these the types of texts that afford the greatest insights for students (both LAC and non- LAC)? This should be a key criterion in text identification and selection and can serve as a highlight in connections between foreign-language and English-language sections.
11. How should study guides to accompany the foreign-language texts be prepared so as to enhance student understanding? Should different texts be prepared in different ways, or is there a standard format (pre-reading, reading, post-reading) that can be applied to the preparation of study guides for all or most texts? If the English language sections also provide study guides to students, then these should be coordinated as much as possible with those of the LAC sections. The single best way to guarantee this is to hold regular weekly meetings with the professor and other TAs to verify that everyone has the same “take-home” message throughout all sections.