Diversity and Decolonization in French Studies: New Approaches to Teaching

Siham Bouamer & Loïc Bourdeau (Eds.)

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The French second/foreign language classroom has its roots in colonialism. As we move toward decolonizing the classroom, French teachers need resources and suggestions on how they can incorporate inclusivity and diversity into their classes. *Diversity and Decolonization in French Studies: New Approaches to Teaching,* edited by Siham Bouamer and Loïc Bourdeau, provides a guide for French language teachers, with explanations of the issues they are addressing, ideas for lesson plans, specific resources, and details on how to implement pedagogies. The book is made up of sixteen chapters written by different researchers/French instructors covering a range of different topics.

The book starts with a chapter summarizing its content and explaining how and why it was created. Part I, "Dismantling the 'Francophonie': Language, Race, and Empire," addresses issues around decolonizing the French language classroom. Chapter 2 (Cecilia Benaglia & Maya Angela Smith) discusses the need for multilingual voices and resources in language classes, suggesting the use of multilingual texts and creation of multilingual memoirs. The legacies of colonialism and racism that are prevalent in French foreign language textbooks are tackled in chapters 3 (Madeline Bedecarré) and 4 (Julia D. Spiegelman). The former focuses on the maps and statistics uncritically presented in coursebooks, while the latter uses Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Studies to analyze these resources, finding underlying racism and colonial legacies. For teachers, these authors include a lesson plan and suggestions about how to critically analyze these textbooks with students. The fifth chapter turns attention to the use of digital resources in decolonization and the classroom. Drawing on two specific examples, Kristen Stern explains how they can be used in French classes of different competency levels. In the following chapter, Marda Messay discusses how she incorporated topics surrounding decolonization and racism in her intermediate French stories and films class. In the final chapter of Part I, Charlotte Daniels and Katherine Dauge-Roth outline the inclusion of an Indigenous voices and stories unit in their francophone studies course and provide a detailed outline of the resources and assignments it included. The section is very cohesive, if slightly repetitive.

Part II, "Intersectional French Studies," considers intersectionality in the French classroom, specifically focusing on feminism, disabled and neurodiverse students, and queer/trans inclusion. Starting with chapter 8 by Thea Fronsman-Cecil, which looks at the importance of creating an accessible French language classroom for disabled and neurodiverse students that benefits the entire class, offering suggestions on how this can be done. The following chapter (Alisha Reaves) focuses on language policy and provides an example lesson plan about the feminization of professional titles in French, including how to explain the political and social history/context of this issue. Next, Blase A. Provitola writes about a course on intersectional French feminism, noting what topics were covered, what resources were used and how, and some ways in which the course could be improved. Finally, Kris Aric Knisely examines trans-affirming queer inquiry-based pedagogies and suggests ways to make the language classroom more inclusive linguistically for queer and trans students with a specific example of a French conversation and pronunciation course.

Part III, "Beyond the Textbook: New Teaching Strategies," discusses various classroom practices and pedagogies that promote decolonization and diversity. Chapter 12 (Hasheem Hakeem) explores queer pedagogy by applying it to two French webcomics focusing on trans issues. The chapter includes results from a study of French immersion high-school students based on these webcomics, including data and transcripts of student reactions. Chapters 13 (Daniel N. Maroun) and 14 (Thomas Muzart) explore the

benefits of decolonization in the classroom and how this can be done using technology, Maroun by using Twitter to teach contemporary French culture and Muzart through a podcast project. The following chapter by Bethany Schiffman explains what multimodal texts are along with specific examples and how they could be practically applied. The final chapter by Kelly Biers discusses decolonial and feminist course design, specifically using the model "specifications grading" and outlining how it was used in a first-year French course. This section covers a wide range of topics but is disjointed at times.

This book sheds light on difficult topics of which French language teachers may not be aware. Different chapters take different approaches to the material, which allows the reader to have a degree of variety depending on what they're looking for. Some chapters (e.g., 2, 8, and 11) use a more explicit method, explaining how the reader could apply their ideas or practices to their own classrooms. Conversely, other chapters only explain what they did, making the reader draw their own conclusions. Each chapter includes elements that teachers can pull inspiration from, whether or not they completely follow the method described. The book provides a unique perspective and fills a gap in resources for French language teachers. Similar articles that cover decolonizing language classrooms include Criser & Knott (2019) and Ehlers-Zavala (2023). However, neither of these articles provides specific examples or resources for teachers, and there are few, if any, similar books or articles around the French language specifically.

The book is strong overall, and numerous chapters give specifics about resources, the context in which they can be used, author/teacher experiences, and specific practices for the classroom. However, other chapters leave you wanting more. Such chapters could benefit from more details about how and in what contexts the reader could use their ideas, as well as some student feedback. The chapters are short, and some sections try to do too much with the space they have, resulting in too little information. The strongest chapters include clear instructions and contexts in their explanations. This is a helpful resource for teachers looking to expand their horizons in their teaching. The book is thoughtful and manages to address a wide variety of topics in a relatively short time. It is also applicable to a range of teaching environments and to different learner proficiencies. This is a resource created by French language teachers, for French language teachers, and many instructors would benefit from its contents.

The Reviewer

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References

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