Chapter 16
How to Read Cultural Literacy
Globally in Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Cultural literacy is what one should need to know to be able to understand, join, and participate properly in a certain culture. This may work temporarily for a short-time contact with a culture against some fatal failures. However, cultural literacy is also what one should and maybe must know not to fall into the blindness of ethnocentrism. Since this blindness is inevitable in any place and any period of time, we, as the people of contemporary times, should be aware of the function of cultural literacy. The function of cultural literacy is based on cultural relativity, which seems to be disappearing under globalization and cultural imperialism.

INTRODUCTION

Since it was coined by E.D. Hirsch (1988), the content and the definition of “cultural literacy” has varied a lot. These variations has been inevitable due to the fact that “culture” has numerous definitions which take it from the view point of history, ethnography, religion, language or politics. So no matter how long it is, but for a text it is not possible to have and express each and every point that culture is in touch.

Cultural literacy is not only what one should and need to know to be able to understand, join and participate properly in a certain culture. This may work temporarily for a short time contact with a culture against some fatal failures. However cultural literacy is also what one should and maybe must know not to fall into the blindness of ethnocentrism. Since this blindness is inevitable in any place and any period of time, we as the people of contemporary times should be aware of the function of cultural literacy. The function of cultural literacy is based on cultural relativity which seems to be disappearing under globalization and cultural imperialism.

Moreover, contrary to what claimed in the title of some books such as Cultural Literacy for Religion: Everything the Well-Educated Person Should Know (Berkson, 2012), cultural literacy is not only for well-educated people. Although well-educated people can be lucky enough to have higher level of

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cultural literacy, they should also be aware that need for cultural literacy and the advantages it provides are not under their monopoly.

**HOW CULTURE WORKS**

Many people tend to define culture as a term that is composed of refined, ideal, finished, excellent items and issues. So, terms such as “cultured” stands for those who are well-educated, enlightened, mature and gentle. Although this framework is not wrong, it is not sufficient and satisfactory. This is because not only educated people are “cultured”. In addition this because culture does not only consist of positive, useful, favorable things, but it also is composed of negative, harmful, undesirable things. For instance in the life style of people in a certain place, they can help each other just for the sake of humanity and they can betray their partners. So the best to handle the term culture is to be aware that culture is structure in which not only good thing but also bad things exist and should exist. Otherwise culture would be a sterile structure instead of a hygienic structure. The difference between these two structures is so vital that in the former one, natural way of life is not possible. Natural way of life is possible only in hygienic occasions in which all whites and blacks exist synchronously.

In a sterile social structure in which “culture” stands only for of positive, useful, favorable things, social tensions and collisions appear, because that form of “culture” ignores natural existence of many other not negative and neutral issues and takes them as threat against its own existence. This is simply defined as ethnocentrism/sociocentrism and cultural imperialism against which no alternative is tolerated and allowed.

**Cultural Literacy**

Literacy has broad framework in which it has many variations such as critical literacy, informational literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, scientific literacy and cultural literacy. Since we will deal with the content of cultural literacy in the further lines, other types should better be revealed briefly. Critical literacy asks questions such as whose voice is being heard and who is silenced. Informational literacy tries to answer questions like what information is needed and how needed information can be located, evaluated and used effectively. Media literacy makes one able to interpret techniques and understand how messages in media are constructed and manipulated. Digital literacy is used to locate, organize, understand, evaluate and create information. Financial literacy provides people with informed judgments and effective decisions about the use and management of capital. Scientific literacy provides people with literature background about scientific concepts and processes. Yet cultural literacy has too broad content to be defined in brief.

The terms “culture” and “literacy” have a very common point that they are both learned and also taught. Through the processes of enculturation, inculturation and acculturation, one learns the culture he/she is born into. (Eller, 2009:26-28) So literacy, with its basic definition, is learned and taught. Moreover, cultural literacy is conveyed best in social structure. So we learn how to “read” a culture. Culture we learn to read is the culture we are born into. Next step in learning cultural literacy is to learn how to “write” a culture. This writing process is a process of production. In this production we make addition to our culture. The simple and little addition is our conscious presence in our family. They are